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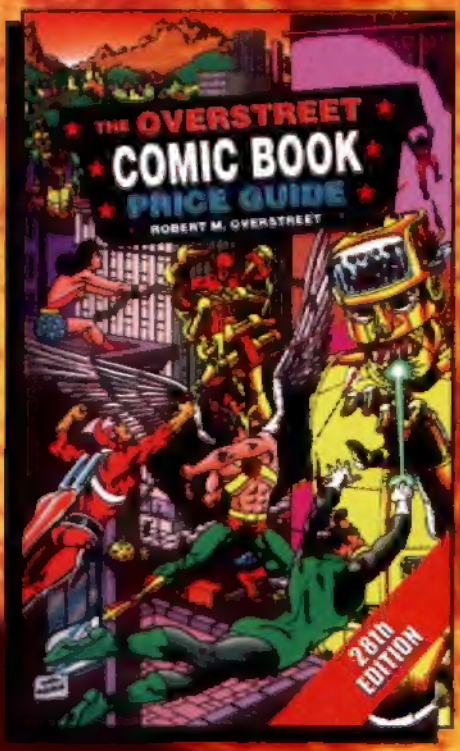

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DOUBLE-CROSSED

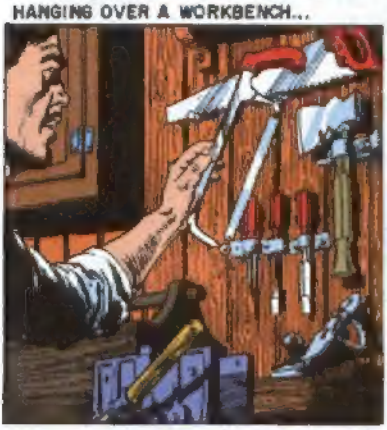
HIS KEY RATTLED IN THE LOCK, TUMBLERS CLICKED, AND I COULD HEAR THE WEATHERSTRIPPING AT THE BASE OF THE OPENING FRONT DOOR SCRATCH AGAINST THE FOYER CARPETING. I PULLED THE KNIFE FROM MY POCKET. HE SHUT THE DOOR GENTLY AND LOCKED IT BEHIND HIM AND REMOVED HIS OVERCOAT. MY HANDS WERE COLD AND TREMBLING AS I SNAPPED OPEN THE KNIFEBLADE. HIS FEET PADDED ACROSS THE THICK RUG. MY KNIFE HAND ACHED. HE CAME NEARER, GROPING IN THE DARK FOR THE LAMP I'D MOVED. I GULPED IN ONE DEEP BREATH AND HELD IT. HE WAS RIGHT OVER ME NOW. THE PULSING IN MY VEINS SEEMED TO FILL THE ROOM WITH A DRUMMING HE MUST SURELY HEAR. HE PASSED BESIDE ME. I LEAPED UP, SLUNG MY ARM ABOUT HIS NECK, AND DROVE THE SHINY SILVER-BLUE BLADE AGAIN AND AGAIN INTO EDWIN JORDON'S BACK...

AT LAST, I LET HIM SLIP DOWN TO THE FLOOR. HE COLLAPSED LIKE AN OLD TIRE TUBE, HISSING. I LOOKED DOWN AT MY VICTIM... AT HIS MOUTH THAT WAS MOVING AS IF IT WERE MECHANICALLY PUMPING OUT THE BLOOD THAT OOZED FROM IT. BECAUSE MY VICTIM AND I LOOKED LIKE ONE AND THE SAME MAN, I COULD ALMOST FEEL THE SHARP PAIN IN MY BACK AS HE SURELY FELT IT IN HIS. I TRIED, WITH HIM, TO GASP FOR THAT LAST BREATH, THEN HIS CHEST SANK AND A SIBILANT SOUND SIGHED PAST HIS BLUISH LIPS. HE WAS DEAD AND I WAS HIS MURDERER. I'D KILLED EDWIN JORDON... NOT KNOWING HIM... NOT EVER HAVING MET HIM OR TALKED TO HIM OR HATED HIM. I KILLED HIM SIMPLY BECAUSE HE *LOOKED LIKE ME!*

AND THEN, BECAUSE HE LOOKED SO MUCH LIKE ME, I TOOK A CANDLESTICK FROM THE MANTLE, AND FELT EVERY BLOW AS I POUNDED HIS UNFEELING FACE INTO A SHAPELESS PULPY MASS...

THERE REMAINED NOW ONLY THE NEED TO GET RID OF HIS BODY. I CARRIED HIM DOWN TO THE CELLAR, REMOVED HIS CLOTHES, AND DUMPED HIM INTO A WASHTUB...

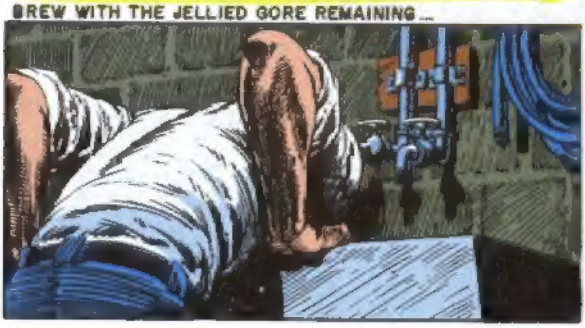
I'D PLANNED TO CARRY HIS REMAINS OUT IN MY SAMPLECASE AND DROP IT INTO THE RIVER, BUT I'D SEEN THE COAL FURNACE. THERE WAS A GOOD FIRE IN IT, AND I REALIZED AT ONCE THAT CREMATION WOULD BE BETTER. I FOUND WHAT TOOLS I NEEDED HANGING OVER A WORKBENCH...



IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT I WOULD HAVE TO DISMEMBER HIS BODY. THE FURNACE OPENING WAS TOO SMALL TO ACCOMODATE THE WHOLE THING AT ONE TIME. I USED THE AXE FIRST...

MY INSIDES CHURNED AS I GRIPPED HIS COLD YELLOWING FLESH, AND INSERTED THE HACKSAW INTO THE AXE CUT TILL IT MET THE HEAVY LEGBONE...

I CHOKED BACK THE NAUSEA BROUGHT ON BY MY GRISLY TASK, THE STENCH OF BLOOD, THE OPPRESSIVE HEAT, AND THE NOXIOUS COAL GAS FUMES. PIECE BY PIECE, I CARRIED THE RESULTS OF MY LABORS TO THE FURNACE. THEN I THREW HIS CLOTHES INTO THE CRACKLING FLAMES. AFTER THAT, I COULD HOLD IT BACK NO LONGER. I HEAVED CONVULSIVELY INTO THE WASHTUB, CREATING A GHASTLY BREW WITH THE JELLIED GORE REMAINING...



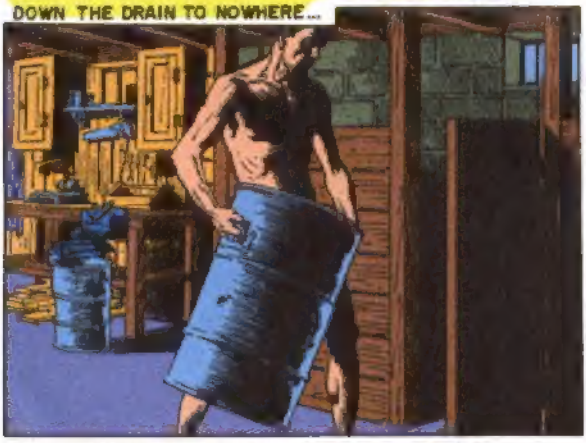
IT WAS FULLY TEN MINUTES BEFORE I COULD SUMMON UP SUFFICIENT STRENGTH TO RUN WATER INTO THE TUB AND SCRUB OUT THE BILIOUS AND SCARLET SLIME. THAT DONE, I LOOKED INTO THE FURNACE, RECOILING AT THE SIGHT OF HIS CHARRED GRINNING SKULL STARING AT ME... THE EYESOCKETS GLOWING. A BLAZING ARM FELL FORWARD SO THAT A SCORCHED STINKING CLAW-LIKE HAND REACHED OUT FOR ME FROM THE SEETHING INFERNO

I RACED UPSTAIRS, THREW OPEN A WINDOW, AND GORGED MYSELF WITH COOL, FRESH, NIGHT AIR. WHEN MY HEAD HAD CLEARED, I CARRIED MY LUGGAGE TO THE CELLAR AND BURNED IT ALL IN THE FURNACE. THEN I BEGAN TO UNDRESS...

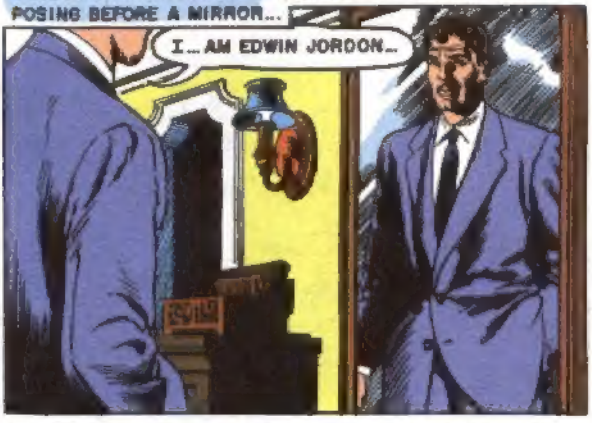
I STRIPPED MYSELF NUDE AND, ALONG WITH EDWIN'S BLOODY CLOTHES, THREW THEM INTO THE FIRE... MY WALLET... EVERYTHING. I WATCHED MY IDENTITY BLAZE UP AND FALL TO ASHES... BLENDING WITH THE ASHES OF THE MAN THAT LOOKED LIKE ME. *EDWIN JORDON* WAS *GONE!* I, *DAVID VOLNEY*, WAS *GONE!* NOW I WAS *EDWIN JORDON*...

LATER, I SHOOK DOWN THE ASHES AND SHOVELED THEM INTO AN ASH-CAN. THEN I REACHED INTO THE FIREBOX WITH THE SHOVEL AND LIFTED OUT THE HEAT-CRACKED STEAMING SKULL AND WHAT BONES HAD NOT BURNED AWAY. I SMASHED THEM INTO POWDER WITH THE BACK OF THE SHOVEL...

I SWEPT THE PULVERIZED BONE INTO THE ASHCAN AND DRAGGED THE LOAD TO THE CELLAR LAVATORY, WHERE, GRADUALLY, I FLUSHED THE EVIDENCES OF MURDER DOWN THE DRAIN TO NOWHERE...



I CLEANED THE CELLAR THOROUGHLY, THEN THE LIVING ROOM. WITH EVERY LAST VESTIGE OF MY GHASTLY TASK REMOVED, I WENT UPSTAIRS AND FOUND THE CLOTHES I NEEDED IN HIS BEDROOM. I DRESSED SLOWLY, FINALLY POSING BEFORE A MIRROR...



I WENT FROM ROOM TO ROOM, CLEANING OFF, THEN IMPRESSING MY FINGERPRINTS ON VARIOUS OBJECTS... ON TABLE-TOPS, ON GLASSES, ON DECANTERS AND SILVERWARE, ON EVERYTHING THAT EDWIN JORDON MIGHT HAVE TOUCHED, WHISPERING ALL THE WHILE...

IN THE DESK IN THE LIBRARY, I FOUND PAPERS WITH HIS HANDWRITING. BY THE END OF TWO HOURS, I HAD ACCOMPLISHED A GOOD LIKENESS TO MY VICTIM'S SIGNATURE BY WRITING AGAIN AND AGAIN...

I BURNED MY PRACTICE PHRASES IN AN ASH TRAY AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE HOURS, RELAXED. I LEANED BACK AND PUT MY FEET UP ON THE LEATHER-TOOLED LIBRARY DESK-TOP AND TRIED TO ARRANGE THE PHANTASMAGORIA OF THE DAY'S EVENTS INTO COHERENT LIVING PICTURES IN MY MIND...

IT'S ALL LIKE SOME *CRAZY DREAM*. A *NIGHTMARE*, ENTWINED WITH A BEAUTIFUL, HEAVENLY *SITUATION*. IT *BEGAN* WHEN I GOT OFF THE TRAIN THIS MORNING. I'D NEVER *BEEN* IN THIS BERG BEFORE...

'IT'D LOOKED LIKE JUST ANOTHER TOWN IN THE NEW TERRITORY THE SILVERLINE HOSIERY COMPANY'S SALES MANAGER HAD ASSIGNED TO ME. I'D FIGURED I'D CHECK IN AT A HOTEL AND CLEAN UP BEFORE I STARTED MY CALLS. I'D FOUND A CAB AT A HACKSTAND NEAR THE STATION...'

TAKE ME TO A *HOTEL*, CABBY.

SURE, MR. JORDON. SAY, I DIDN'T *KNOW* YOU BEEN OUT OF *TOWN!*

'I'D THOUGHT I'D HEARD WRONG UNTIL THE CABBY'D CALLED ME BY THAT NAME AGAIN...'

NOT GOIN' *HOME*, EH, MR. JORDON? HOW ABOUT THE HOTEL *ROYCE*...

LISTEN, BUD... YOU HAVE ME *CONFUSED* WITH SOMEONE *ELSE*. MY NAME'S DAVID *VOLNEY*... *NOT JORDON!*

'THE CABBY'D LOOKED AROUND AT ME WITH A WRY GRIN AND HE'D WINKED SLYLY...'

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT *ME*, MR. JORDON! AFTER I *DROP YOU* AT THE *HOTEL*, I'LL *FORGET* I *SEEN* YOU!

OKAY, BUD! HAVE IT YOUR *OWN* WAY! ONLY KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE *ROAD!* I WANT TO GET THERE IN *ONE PIECE!*

'THE BELLHOP WHO'D TAKEN MY LUGGAGE AT THE HOTEL ROYCE HADN'T APPEARED ANY TOO PLEASED TO SEE ME. AND THE DESK CLERK HAD LOOKED AT ME AND TURNED PALE...'

ER... WILL YOU BE... STAYING WITH US *LONG*, MR. JORDON?

LOOK, JOHNNY! THE *NAME* ON THE *REGISTER* IS THE *RIGHT* NAME! AND I'LL BE WITH YOU TILL *TOMORROW EVENING!*

'I'D SEEN THAT THE DESK CLERK HADN'T BELIEVED ME. HE'D SUMMONED A BELLHOP AND HAD HANDED HIM A KEY, SAYING SARCASTICALLY...'

TAKE MR. JORD—...OH, I *BEG* YOUR *PARDON*... MR...ER... MR. *VOLNEY'S* THINGS TO ROOM 414...

YES, SIR!

'I'D BEGUN TO CATCH ON WHEN THE ELEVATOR DOORS HAD OPENED AND THE OPERATOR HAD DONE A DOUBLE TAKE. *HE'D* CALLED ME "MR. JORDON" *TOO*...'

WHAT'S *WITH* THIS "*MR. JORDON*" *DEAL*? AM I BEING SET UP FOR A *MARK* OR DO YOU CALL *EVERY* STRANGER THAT COMES TO TOWN "*JORDON*"?

UH... *SORRY*, SIR! I WON'T *MENTION* THAT YOU'RE STAYING AT THE HOTEL, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU *WANT*, MR. JOR—...UH...SIR!

'IT'D WORRIED ME...THIS BEING MISTAKEN FOR A GUY NAMED JORDON. WHILE SHAVING, I'D LOOKED AT MYSELF IN THE MIRROR...'

JORDON... JORDON... MUST BE A *BIG SHOT* IN THIS BERG, THE WAY *EVERYBODY* IN TOWN *KNOWS HIM ON SIGHT...*

'I'D GONE DOWN TO THE HOTEL RESTAURANT FOR LUNCH, PROMISING MYSELF TO FORGET ABOUT THIS JORDON CHARACTER. I'D BEEN HALF-THROUGH MY MEAL WHEN I'D GLANCED UP, SITTING OPPOSITE ME AT ANOTHER TABLE WAS THE MOST GORGEOUS THING I'D LAID EYES ON IN YEARS. SHE'D LOOKED AT ME AT THE SAME TIME, TURNED BEET-RED, AND NUDGED HER DAPPER-LOOKING ESCORT...'

THEY'VE GOT ME TAGGED FOR JORDON, *TOO*, I'LL BET MY BOTTOM DOLLAR. AND IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE *THOSE TWO* DON'T *LIKE* HIM, THE WAY THEY'RE *GLARING!*

'IT'D STARTED ME WORRYING ALL OVER AGAIN. AFTER I'D FINISHED MY COFFEE, I'D GONE TO THE LOBBY TO BUY A PAPER, HOPING TO FIND SOMETHING ELSE TO EASE MY TROUBLED MIND. WHAT I'D SEEN, BIG AS LIFE, ON THE SECOND PAGE, IN AMONG THE GOSSIP-TYPE ITEMS, DARN NEAR KNOCKED ME OVER...'

WHAT THE...?

CIGARS

'THERE WAS *MY PICTURE*, GRINNING STUPIDLY UP AT ME! ONLY THE *NAME* UNDER IT WASN'T *MINE!* AND *NEXT* TO ME, WAS *ANOTHER* PICTURE! *THE DAME BACK IN THE RESTAURANT...*'

DIVORCE IMMINENT?

EDWIN JORDON

IRIS JORDON

ATTEMPT AT RECONCILIATION FAILS.

"I STILL LOVE HER."—EDWIN

"I'VE FOUND SOMEONE ELSE."—IRIS

'SUDDENLY, I'D GOTTEN VERY *INTERESTED* IN EDWIN JORDON. *PART* OF IT HAD BEEN HIS *WIFE. PART* OF IT HAD BEEN HER *DESCRIPTION* OF HIM...'

"INTERVIEWED LAST NIGHT, IRIS JORDON LOOKED AFFECTIONATELY AT 'THE OTHER MAN', WHO LIVES AT THE HOTEL ROYCE, AND ASSURED REPORTERS, 'I HAVE NO INTENTION OF GOING BACK TO MY *MILLIONAIRE* HUSBAND!'..."

PERFECTOS

'AND THEN, I'D LOWERED THE PAPER. I'D SENSED THEM STANDING BESIDE ME... IRIS JORDON AND HER FOP BOY-FRIEND... GLOWERING AT ME... EYES FILLED WITH FIERY HATE...'

WELL... HELLO... IRIS!

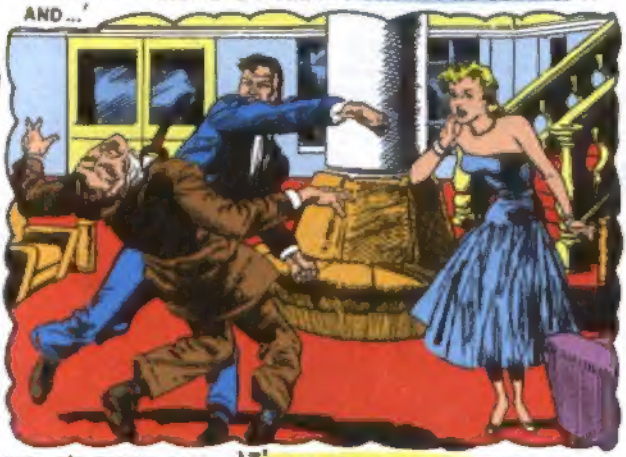
'SHE'D EXPLODED...'

YOU *SNIVELING SNEAKING CRUMB.* I ALWAYS *KNEW* YOU *WEREN'T MUCH OF A MAN,* BUT I'D *EXPECTED* YOU TO HAVE THE *DECENCY* NOT TO *COME HERE!*

A LOT OF *UGLY WORDS* POUR FROM THAT *PRETTY MOUTH,* BABY. WHY DON'T YOU *SHUT IT UP!* YOU *SPOIL* THE *ILLUSION!*

'HEARING THAT KIND OF TALK FROM HER "HUSBAND" HAD STAGGERED IRIS JORDON. SHE'D JUST STARED AT ME, DUMBFOUNDED. JAMES FENNELL, THE "OTHER MAN" HAD CLOSED HIS HANDS INTO FISTS, TRYING TO LOOK REAL TOUGH, AND HAD SNARLED..!'

'I'D BEEN PLAYING IT BIG FOR IRIS, AND HADN'T EXPECTED FENNELL TO CALL MY BLUFF. HE'D LASHED A ROUNDHOUSE RIGHT AT ME. LUCKILY I'D SEEN IT COMING. I'D BLOCKED IT AND...'



'FENNELL'D GONE DOWN AND STAYED THERE UNTIL A COP ARRIVED. SOMEBODY'D CALLED HIM WHEN IT'D LOOKED LIKE TROUBLE BREWING. ALL THAT TIME, IRIS HAD KEPT STARING AT ME AS THOUGH SHE COULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT SHE'D HEARD OR SEEN...'

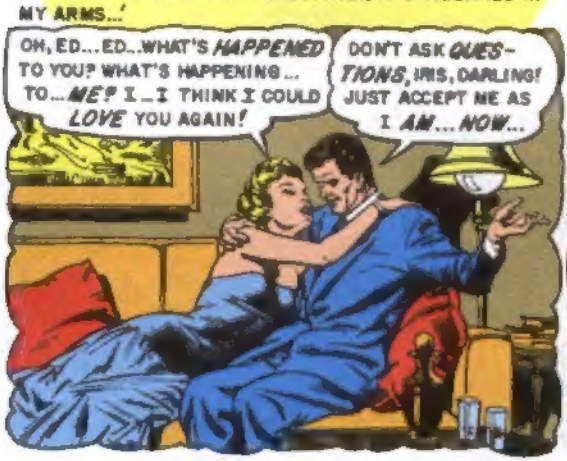
MR. FENNELL STARTED IT, OFFICER. HE TRIED TO HIT ME... ISN'T THAT RIGHT, IRIS?
WELL...I ...ER...YES ...HE DID TRY TO HIT EDWIN FIRST!
YOU'D BETTER LEAVE, MR. FENNELL!

'ALL OF A SUDDEN, I'D FOUND MYSELF ALONE WITH IRIS, AND HAD SEEN THOSE LOVELY VIOLET-BLUE EYES LOOK SEARCHINGLY INTO MINE. AND I'D GOTTEN THE WILDEST IDEA...'

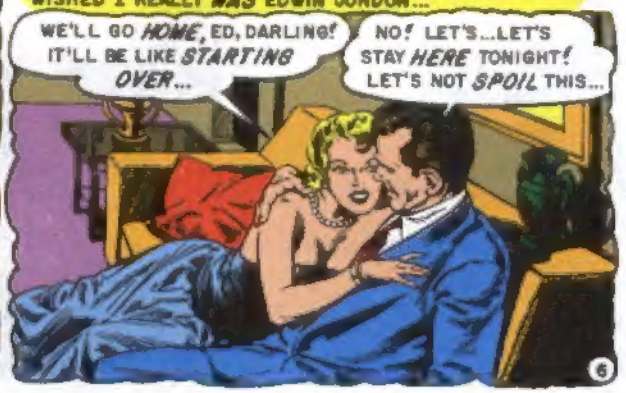
'I'D LED IRIS UP TO THE HOTEL ROOM, LOCKED THE DOOR BEHIND US, AND TAKEN HER IN MY ARMS...'

YOU'RE...YOU'RE NOT THE SAME ED... THE WAY YOU ACTED WITH JIM. YOU'RE... YOU'VE CHANGED!
DARLING, YOU'RE GOING TO FIND ME DIFFERENT IN A LOT OF WAYS...

'HER BODY'D GROWN TAUT FOR AN INSTANT WHEN I'D KISSED HER, BUT JUST AS QUICKLY, IT'D RELAXED IN MY ARMS...'


OH, ED... ED...WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU? WHAT'S HAPPENING... TO...ME? I...I THINK I COULD LOVE YOU AGAIN!
DON'T ASK QUESTIONS, IRIS, DARLING! JUST ACCEPT ME AS I AM... NOW...

'I'D THOUGHT IT WOULD BE THAT...AND GOODBYE... A FLING...A SITUATION THAT I'D TAKEN GOOD ADVANTAGE OF. BUT, I'D NEVER KNOWN A WOMAN LIKE IRIS...EVER. AFTERWARDS WE'D TALKED, AND I'D FELT LIKE A HEEL, AND I'D WISHED I REALLY WAS EDWIN JORDON...'



'AFTER A WHILE, IRIS FELL ASLEEP AND I HAD A LITTLE TIME TO THINK...'

IF I COULD *KEEP ON* BEING EDWIN JORDAN, I'D HAVE *IRIS* FOR *KEEPS*... *HER* AND *HIS MILLIONS!* THERE'S *GOT* TO BE SOME WAY! THERE'S *GOT TO*...

'I'D LIT ANOTHER CIGARETTE AND HAD STARTED TO PACE THE FLOOR WHEN I'D SPIED IRIS'S PURSE ON THE DRESSER. I'D OPENED IT, LIFTING OUT HER WALLET WITH HER ADDRESS AND HER KEYS...'

38 DARBY DRIVE. HMMMM ...

'I'D COME UP WITH THE *ONLY POSSIBLE SOLUTION: EDWIN JORDAN HAD TO DIE!* I TOOK MY LUGGAGE, EASED OUT OF THE HOTEL ROOM, AND LEFT BY A FIRE EXIT OUT A BACK ALLEY...'

38 DARBY DRIVE, CABBY.

YES, SIR! I *KNOW*, MR. JORDAN!

'NO ONE HAD ANSWERED THE BELL, SO I'D LET MYSELF IN.'

'I'D WAITED IN THE LIVING ROOM, FINGERED THE SWITCH-BLADE KNIFE IN MY POCKET...'

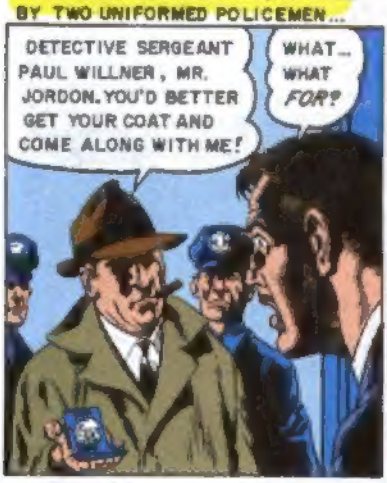
IT'S NOT GOING TO BE *EASY* KILLING A MAN I'VE NEVER *MET*... SOMEBODY WHO'S NEVER DONE ME ANY *HARM*... WHO ONLY *LOOKS* LIKE ME!

'BUT I'D WORKED MYSELF UP...'

HE'S ALL THAT'S BETWEEN IRIS AND *ME*... AND A *MILLION BUCKS!* YEAH, IT'LL BE *WORTH* IT NOT HAVING TO ROAM FROM TOWN TO TOWN, PEDDLING HOSIERY, SCRATCHING FOR A LOUSY SEVENTY-FIVE BUCKS A WEEK...

...AND SO I'D *WAITED*... AND HE'D *COME*... AND NOW HE'S *GONE*, AND *I'M EDWIN JORDAN!* I'M... *OH-OH!* SOMEONE AT THE *DOOR!* MIGHT AS WELL *BEGIN ACTING THE PART*...

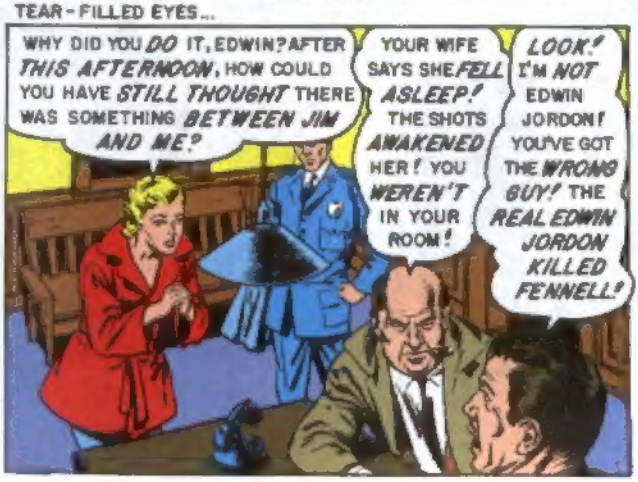
I TOOK MY FEET OFF THE LIBRARY DESK AND HURRIED TO THE FRONT DOOR. A BURLY MAN STOOD THERE, FLASHING A BADGE AT ME, FLANKED BY TWO UNIFORMED POLICEMEN...



I PICKED UP JORDON'S OVERCOAT FROM THE CHAIR AND WENT ALONG WITH WILLNER TO POLICE HEADQUARTERS, HOMICIDE DIVISION. HE TOLD ME THE WHOLE STORY...

WE GOT TEN WITNESSES WHO SAW YOU STORM INTO THE HOTEL LATE THIS AFTERNOON SCREAMING, "IF I CAN'T HAVE HER, NO ONE CAN!" THEN YOU WENT UP TO HIS ROOM! AND SHOT HIM FIVE TIMES!
YOU'RE CRAZY! I WAS IN MY OWN ROOM... WITH... IRIS!

THEY BROUGHT IN IRIS TOO. SHE LOOKED AT ME THROUGH TEAR-FILLED EYES...


WHY DID YOU DO IT, EDWIN? AFTER THIS AFTERNOON, HOW COULD YOU HAVE STILL THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING BETWEEN JIM AND ME?
YOUR WIFE SAYS SHE FELL ASLEEP! THE SHOTS AWAKENED HER! YOU WEREN'T IN YOUR ROOM!
LOOK! I'M NOT EDWIN JORDON! YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG GUY! THE REAL EDWIN JORDON KILLED FENNELL!

THEY LOOKED AT ME... ALL OF THEM... LIKE I WAS CRAZY!

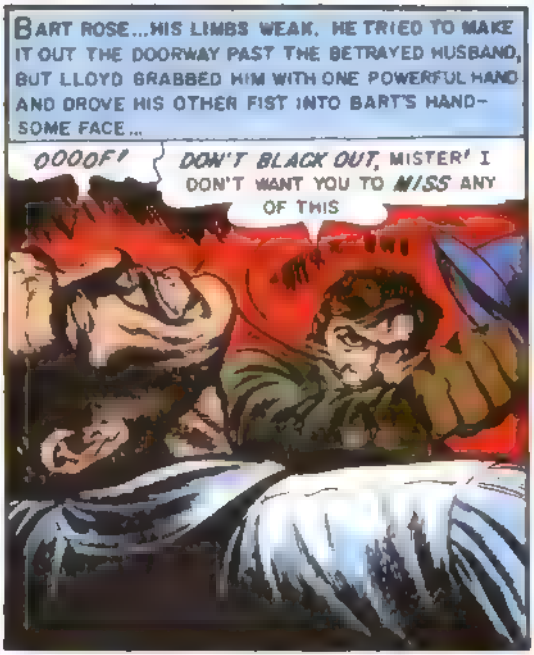
COME NOW, MR. JORDON. I'VE KNOWN YOU ALL MY LIFE! LOOK... WE COULD PICK UP YOUR FINGERPRINTS ANYWHERE IN YOUR HOUSE...
THIS GUN WAS IN HIS OVERCOAT POCKET, CHIEF! IT'S THE MURDER WEAPON! AND THESE GLOVES ARE THE ONES HE WORE...
OH, EDWIN... SOB...

WHAT COULD I HAVE TOLD THEM THAT I MURDERED THE REAL MR. JORDON? LORD, I COULDN'T HAVE EVEN PROVEN IT, I DID SUCH A GOOD JOB OF GETTING RID OF THE EVIDENCE! SO I'M GOING TO BE EXECUTED FOR THE MURDER OF A MAN I DIDN'T KILL... WHO WAS REALLY KILLED BY THE MAN I DID MURDER! MY DOUBLE... CROSSED ME UP!

CRUSHED ICE

THE SKY WORE A COLD BROWNISH TINGE THAT MID-WINTER NIGHT. OUTSIDE, A BITTER BITING WIND HOWLED, AS THOUGH ANGERED BY ITS INABILITY TO PENETRATE THE WELL-INSULATED WALLS OF THE HAINES MANSION. THE SNOW LAY DEEP IN THAT LONELY ISOLATED STRETCH IN NORTHEASTERN QUEBEC. HOW PLEASANT WAS THE CONTRAST WITHIN THOSE THICK MANSION WALLS. THE WARMTH OF A CRACKLING BLAZE IN THE HUGE FIREPLACE. THE RICH, LUSH FURNISHINGS OF THE LIVING ROOM. AND ABOVE ALL, THE WARMTH OF THE BEAUTIFUL, PASSIONATE WIFE BART HELD IN HIS ARMS. AH, YES. A MAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE, THEY SAY...UNTIL A DOOR OPENS NOISILY IN THE ENTRANCE HALL... AND THE WIND HOWLS LOUDER BEFORE IT SLAMS CLOSED AGAIN AND HEAVY OVERSHOES CROSS TO THE LIVING ROOM. IN THAT INSTANT BEFORE THE LIVING ROOM DOORS WERE FLUNG OPEN, BART AND RITA FELT A SUDDEN CHILL. BUT NOT FROM THE ICY WIND. BART AND RITA WERE *AFRAID*. FOR THIS WAS *NOT BART'S CASTLE*. AND *RITA* WAS *NOT BART RYAN'S WIFE*...

BART! IT'S LLOYD! IT'S MY HUSBAND...
GOOD LORD, RITA! YOU SAID...
SHE SAID I'D BE GONE FOR A WEEK. WELL, I'M BACK EARLY, MISTER! NOW STAND UP AND TAKE WHAT'S COMING TO YOU!


BART ROSE...HIS LIMBS WEAK. HE TRIED TO MAKE IT OUT THE DOORWAY PAST THE BETRAYED HUSBAND, BUT LLOYD GRABBED HIM WITH ONE POWERFUL HAND AND DROVE HIS OTHER FIST INTO BART'S HANDSOME FACE...
OOOOF!
DON'T BLACK OUT, MISTER! I DON'T WANT YOU TO MISS ANY OF THIS

ALL OF THE HURT AND FURY IN LLOYD LASHED OUT AT HIS WIFE'S LOVER..
WHEN I'M.. UUHH...FINISHED WITH YOU, MISTER...UHHH YOU WON'T BE ANY GOOD TO MY WIFE... OR TO... ANY OTHER WOMAN...
FOR GOD'S SAKE RITA! DO SOMETHING! STOP HIM..

AND WHAT WAS *LEFT* FOR RITA? LLOYD WOULD BEAT HER, TOO... OR EVEN WORSE, HE'D THROW HER OUT. NO MORE PAMPERED PET OF A CANADIAN MILLIONAIRE HUSBAND... NO MORE RICH GIFTS... NO MORE FINE HOME... LUXURIES. WHAT WAS THERE *LEFT* FOR RITA TO DO BUT GO TO THE DRAWER WHERE SHE KNEW LLOYD KEPT A LOADED GUN...

HELP ME... OOOWWW RITA!

RITA HURRIED TO HER FLAILING LOVER'S SIDE WITH THE GUN AND THRUST IT INTO HIS HAND. LLOYD STARED IN DISMAY...

W-WHY, RITA?! I-I'VE BEEN *GOOD* TO YOU!

WHY, LLOYD? BECAUSE I CAN'T *STAND* YOU! BECAUSE YOU *BORE* ME! BECAUSE ALL I'VE EVER *WANTED* FROM YOU WAS YOUR *MONEY!* BECAUSE I *LOVE* BART, AND *YOU'RE* IN MY *WAY*. *GO AHEAD*, DARLING! *SHOOT! SHOOT HIM!*

BART SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER. THE REPORT EXPLODED THROUGH THE ROOM AND A BLUE WISP BEARING THE SCENT OF CORDITE ROSE FROM THE MUZZLE OF THE GUN IN BART'S HAND. LLOYD LOOKED SURPRISED WITH THE LITTLE ROUND HOLE IN HIS FOREHEAD...

HE SWAYED CRAZILY FOR A MOMENT, THEN PITCHED FACE-FORWARD ONTO THE FIREPLACE HEARTH. RITA SHUDDERED...

CHOKE.. OH, *HOLD ME*, BART! I'M.. *AFRAID*...

THERE'S *NO TIME* FOR ANY OF *THAT* NOW, RITA. WE'VE GOT TO GET *RID* OF HIM!

THEN THE SMELL OF BURNED FLESH FILLED THE ROOM. RITA SCREAMED

HIS FACE! *OH, LORD!*

BART DRAGGED THE BODY WITH THE [illegible] ...

IT... IT'S *HORRIBLE*, BART! *PLEASE*... CHOKE.. GET HIM *OUT* OF HERE!

WHERE? I *CAN'T* BURY HIS BODY IN THE *SNOW!* *SNOW MELTS!* *THINK OF SOMETHING!*

THE *RIVER*, BART! THE *HAMILTON RIVER!* IT'S *FROZEN OVER!* THE ICE IS *THICK*. YOU CAN TAKE AN *AXE*...

YEAH! UNDER THE ICE! THE CURRENT WILL [illegible] *DOWNSTREAM!* BY *SPRING*... NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO *RECOGNIZE* HIM...

THE SLEIGH THAT LLOYD HAD RETURNED IN WAITED OUTSIDE. BART DRAGGED LLOYD'S CORPSE OUT TO IT. RITA REMEMBERED THE LUGGAGE...

I'LL BE *AFRAID*, BEING *ALONE*, BART! COME BACK AS *QUICKLY* AS YOU *CAN!*

SURE, HONEY! *I'LL MAKE IT FAST!* HAVE A *GOOD STIFF DRINK* WAITING FOR ME. AND *AIR OUT THAT ROOM!* IT SMELLS AWFUL...

BART REACHED THE RIVER IN FIFTEEN MINUTES. HE HAULED HIS GRIM LOAD ACROSS THE ICE AND BEGAN TO CHOP. THAT WAS THE LONG TIRING PART OF THE JOB ...THE CHOPPING, BUT BART WASN'T TOO TIRED TO NOTICE LLOYD'S DIAMOND RING...

MUST BE WORTH AT LEAST *FIVE THOUSAND BUCKS!* WELL, YOU WON'T BE NEEDING *THIS* ANYMORE, MY FRIEND. WE'LL *SWAP!* *ICE*...FOR *ICE*..

BART REMOVED THE RING AND SLIPPED IT ONTO HIS OWN FINGER. THEN HE LOWERED THE BODY INTO THE BLACK HOLE...INTO THE SWIFT CURRENT THAT FLOWED BENEATH THE THICK ICE...

SO LONG, BIG SHOT. AND *THANKS FOR EVERYTHING*...INCLUDING *RITA* AND THE *SIX MILLION* THAT GOES *WITH* HER...

BART HURRIED BACK TO THE SLEIGH AND RETURNED WITH THE LUGGAGE. LLOYD'S CORPSE HAD NOT GONE DOWN. THE HORRIBLY SEARED FACE GRINNED UP AT BART.. THE COLD, DEAD, STARING EYES SHINING IN THE BLACKNESS...

BLAST YOU..

BART SHOVED A SUITCASE DOWN UPON THE CHARRED FACE, PUSHING IT BELOW THE BLACK WATER...

NOW YOU'LL GO DOWN *NOW!*

THE LUGGAGE VANISHED INTO THE CURRENT, AND THE CORPSE OF LLOYD HAINES VANISHED WITH IT. BART WAITED IN THE NUMBING COLD FOR A WHILE, UNTIL HE WAS SURE. A THIN MEMBRANE OF ICE WAS ALREADY FORMING ACROSS THE EXPOSED WATER IN THE GAPING HOLE WHEN BART TURNED AND TRUDGED BACK ACROSS THE FROZEN RIVER TO THE SLEIGH...

BART RETURNED TO RITA'S EAGERLY WAITING ARMS, BUT HE FOUND LITTLE COMFORT THERE. IT WAS TOO SOON TO FORGET THAT SCORCHED FACE AND THE EYES STARING. HE SHUDDERED...

WHAT'S *WRONG*, BART? HE'S *GONE!* WE'RE *RID* OF HIM.. FOREVER! *HOLD* ME! HOLD ME *TIGHT!*

I'M...I'M *CHILLED*, I GUESS.. FROM *DIGGING IN THE ICE!* I...I NEED A *DRINK!*

So BART POURED HIMSELF A DRINK. AND THEN ANOTHER. AND SIX MONTHS LATER. AFTER RITA HAD MADE ALL THE OUTWARD GESTURES OF A WORRIED WIFE, CALLING THE POLICE, REPORTING THAT HER HUSBAND HAD NEVER RETURNED FROM HIS BUSINESS TRIP, AND INSISTING UPON A THOROUGH SEARCH FOR HER MISSING SPOUSE. BART WAS *STILL* POURING.

PLEASE, DEAR! *DON'T DRINK ANYMORE!* YOU'LL MAKE YOURSELF *SICK!*

LE'ME *ALONE!* I'LL BE ALL RIGHT!

AFTER A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME HAD ELAPSED, RITA HAD HER MISSING HUSBAND DECLARED LEGALLY DEAD AND SHE AND BART WERE QUIETLY MARRIED. BART'S DRINKING, HOWEVER, CONTINUED...

WE CAN'T GO *ON* LIKE THIS, BART... YOU GETTING *DRUNK* EVERY NIGHT! WHAT *KIND* OF LIFE *IS* TH S?

I *GOTTA* DRINK! IF I *DON'T* DRINK, I'LL START *SEEIN'* HIM AGAIN.. THOSE *EYES*, STARING UP AT ME..

SEEING *LLOYD?* OH, *BART*, DARLING! WHY DIDN'T YOU *TELL* ME?

WHAT *GOOD* WOULD IT DO? COULD *YOU* TAKE THOSE EYES *AWAY?* IT'S IT'S GOTTEN SO, I DREAD GOIN' T' *SLEEP* AT NIGHT! I *DREAM* ABOUT HIM *COMING* FOR ME... *CLOSER... CLOSER...*

'THE DREAMS ALL START THE SAME WAY! I'M WALKIN' ON THE ICE. BEING DRAWN IRRESISTABLY TOWARDS THE HOLE.. THE BLACK, BLACK HOLE.'

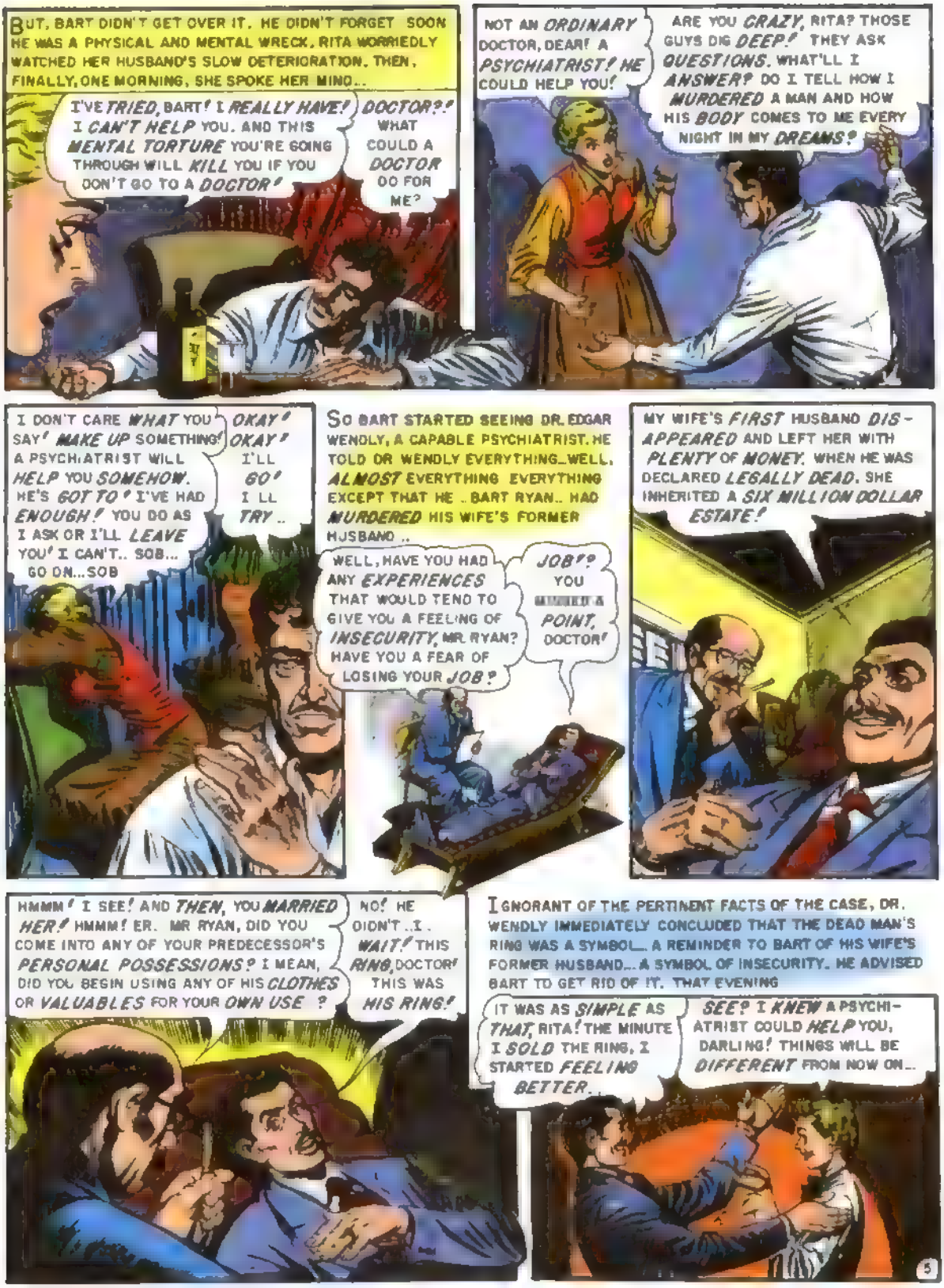
'AND THEN, WHEN I GET THERE, HIS CORPSE BEGINS TO RISE OUT OF THE MURKY RIVER DEPTHS RISING AND GRINNING AT ME. WITH THOSE EYES...'

'AND I CAN'T MOVE, OR CRY OUT, OR EVEN RAISE MY ARMS TO PROTECT MYSELF. ALL I CAN DO IS STAND THERE WHILE IT COMES TOWARD ME WITH THAT SLOW STIFF-LEGGED STUMBLING WALK. STARING AT ME WITH THOSE LIFELESS EYES... GRINNING AT ME WITH THOSE BURNED-AWAY LIPS.'

BART'S VOICE TRAILED OFF INTO A CHOKING JOB.

EACH TIME IT COMES A LITTLE *CLOSER* BEFORE I WAKE UP IN A COLD SWEAT, RITA! SOMEDAY IT'S GONNA *GET*... ME... AND IT'LL BE *OVER*...

DON'T *TALK* LIKE THAT, DARLING! YOU'LL GET *OVER* IT! YOU'LL *FORGET!* I'LL *MAKE* YOU FORGET!


BUT, BART DIDN'T GET OVER IT. HE DIDN'T FORGET SOON HE WAS A PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WRECK. RITA WORRIEDLY WATCHED HER HUSBAND'S SLOW DETERIORATION. THEN, FINALLY, ONE MORNING, SHE SPOKE HER MIND...
I'VE TRIED, BART! I REALLY HAVE! I CAN'T HELP YOU. AND THIS MENTAL TORTURE YOU'RE GOING THROUGH WILL KILL YOU IF YOU DON'T GO TO A DOCTOR!
DOCTOR?! WHAT COULD A DOCTOR DO FOR ME?
NOT AN ORDINARY DOCTOR, DEAR! A PSYCHIATRIST! HE COULD HELP YOU!
ARE YOU CRAZY, RITA? THOSE GUYS DIG DEEP! THEY ASK QUESTIONS. WHAT'LL I ANSWER? DO I TELL HOW I MURDERED A MAN AND HOW HIS BODY COMES TO ME EVERY NIGHT IN MY DREAMS?
I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY! MAKE UP SOMETHING! A PSYCHIATRIST WILL HELP YOU SOMEHOW. HE'S GOT TO! I'VE HAD ENOUGH! YOU DO AS I ASK OR I'LL LEAVE YOU! I CAN'T.. SOB... GO ON...SOB
OKAY! OKAY! I'LL GO! I LL TRY..
SO BART STARTED SEEING DR. EDGAR WENDLY, A CAPABLE PSYCHIATRIST. HE TOLD DR WENDLY EVERYTHING...WELL, ALMOST EVERYTHING EVERYTHING EXCEPT THAT HE .. BART RYAN.. HAD MURDERED HIS WIFE'S FORMER HUSBAND ..
WELL, HAVE YOU HAD ANY EXPERIENCES THAT WOULD TEND TO GIVE YOU A FEELING OF INSECURITY, MR. RYAN? HAVE YOU A FEAR OF LOSING YOUR JOB?
JOB!? YOU MISSED A POINT, DOCTOR!
MY WIFE'S FIRST HUSBAND DISAPPEARED AND LEFT HER WITH PLENTY OF MONEY. WHEN HE WAS DECLARED LEGALLY DEAD, SHE INHERITED A SIX MILLION DOLLAR ESTATE!
HMMM! I SEE! AND THEN, YOU MARRIED HER! HMMM! ER. MR RYAN, DID YOU COME INTO ANY OF YOUR PREDECESSOR'S PERSONAL POSSESSIONS? I MEAN, DID YOU BEGIN USING ANY OF HIS CLOTHES OR VALUABLES FOR YOUR OWN USE ?
NO! HE DIDN'T..I. WAIT! THIS RING, DOCTOR! THIS WAS HIS RING!
IGNORANT OF THE PERTINENT FACTS OF THE CASE, DR. WENDLY IMMEDIATELY CONCLUDED THAT THE DEAD MAN'S RING WAS A SYMBOL... A REMINDER TO BART OF HIS WIFE'S FORMER HUSBAND... A SYMBOL OF INSECURITY. HE ADVISED BART TO GET RID OF IT. THAT EVENING
IT WAS AS SIMPLE AS THAT, RITA! THE MINUTE I SOLD THE RING, I STARTED FEELING BETTER..
SEE? I KNEW A PSYCHIATRIST COULD HELP YOU, DARLING! THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT FROM NOW ON...
5

BUT THINGS WEREN'T DIFFERENT AT ALL. WHEN SLEEP CAME TO BART RYAN THAT NIGHT, THE DREAM RETURNED...
NO! NO! NO!
HE BOLTED OUT OF BED EVEN BEFORE HE WAS FULLY AWAKE, AND HIS HOARSE CRY OF TERROR WOKE RITA WITH A START...
WHAT...WHAT IS IT, BART? OH, DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE HAD THAT AWFUL NIGHTMARE AGAIN..
HE...SOB...HE WAS SO CLOSE, RITA! I KNOW... I KNOW THAT WHEN HE REACHED ME, IT'LL BE THE END...
IN THE MORNING, RITA ACCOMPANIED BART TO DOCTOR WENDEY'S OFFICE...
I'M SORRY, MRS. RYAN! I HAVE THE FEELING THAT YOUR HUSBAND IS HOLDING SOMETHING BACK FROM ME! I CAN-NOT GIVE A CORRECT ANALYSIS WITHOUT ALL OF THE FACTS...
HE HAS EVERYTHING, DOCTOR ..EVERY-THING ANYONE WOULD WANT! WHY I EVEN BOUGHT A YACHT... AND BART'S HARDLY BEEN ON IT!
PERHAPS AN OCEAN VOYAGE WOULD BE JUST THE THING, MRS. RYAN! YOUR HUSBAND COULD USE A CHANGE OF SCENE . REST.. QUIET..
DARLING! WHAT A WONDERFUL IDEA! WE SHOULD SAIL TO SCOTLAND THIS...
SUITS ME, RITA! I'LL TRY ANY-THING..
RITA ORDERED THE YACHT READIED AT ONCE AND TWO DAYS LATER, THEY SET SAIL FOR SCOTLAND...
YOU'RE LOOKING BETTER ALREADY, BART!
I'M BEGINNING TO FEEL BETTER, DEAR! THIS OCEAN AIR IS INVIGORATING. I SLEPT LIKE A LOG LAST NIGHT! AND GUESS WHAT! I DIDN'T DREAM!
DURING THE DAYS THEY STROLLED THE DECKS IN THE BRISK SPRING ATLANTIC AIR. AT NIGHT THEY DANCED IN THEIR CABIN ..
HONEY! WE'LL DANCE ALL ACROSS EUROPE! LONDON.. PARIS...ROME...
YOU'LL DO EXACTLY AS THE DOCTOR ORDERED! YOU'LL REST! COME ON! THAT'S ENOUGH FOR ..
THE SUDDEN JOLT HURLED THEM TO THE FLOOR. THERE WAS A GRINDING NOISE ..THE SOUND OF SNAPPING TIMBERS.. THE THROATY CRIES OF FRIGHTENED CREWMEN ..
BART! WHAT IS IT?
THE FOG! WE MUST HAVE HIT ANOTHER SHIP! C'MON! WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
6

THE GRINDING SMASHING SOUNDS IN THE FORWARD PART OF THE SHIP SEEMED TO BE COMING CLOSER, AS BART STUMBLED ACROSS THE PITCHING CABIN FLOOR TO THE DOOR, HE YANKED ON THE KNOB..

IT'S *JAMMED SHUT*, RITA! IT *WON'T OPEN!* WE'RE TRAPPED!

BART! WE *CAN'T* JUST STAY HERE, WAITING TO *DIE*...

THE RIPPING, TEARING, CRUSHING NOISE WAS ROARING LOUDER NOW .. COMING CLOSER.. CLOSER. BART AND RITA RUSHED TO THE PORTHOLES .. TOO SMALL TO ESCAPE THROUGH. THEIR TERRIFIED SHRIEKS FOR HELP WERE DROWNED OUT BY THE LOUDER SCREAMS AND SHOUTS AND CURSES OF THE CREW STAMPEDING INTO THE LIFEBOATS...

HELP! OH, *PLEASE*..

WE'RE *TRAPPED* IN HERE! *HELP*...

THEY TURNED AND WAITED .. HELPLESS AND HOPELESS. THE GRINDING CRUNCHING ROARING DEAFENED THEM AND DROWNED OUT THEIR SCREAMS AS THE CABIN WALL BEGAN TO CRUMBLE LIKE A MATCHBOX .

WHAT *IS* IT, BART!?

OH, *LORD*

..AND THE GREAT COLD WHITE COLOSSUS PRESSED TOWARDS THEM .. THE HUGE DEADLY MASS OF ICE .. SPLINTERING THE FLOOR .. PUSHING THEM UP AGAINST THE WALL .. CRUSHING.. CRUSHING..

.. CRUSHING THEM TILL THEIR CAPILLARIES RUPTURED.. TILL THE BLOOD OOZED FROM THEIR PORES, THEIR NOSTRILS, THEIR MOUTHS.. TILL THEIR FLESH BURST OPEN IN A DOZEN PLACES..

BUT IT WAS NOT MERELY THE GHASTLY KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY WERE DYING A HORRIBLE DEATH THAT FILLED BART AND RITA WITH INDESCRIBABLE TERROR. IT WAS THE *GRINNING FACE* STARING AT THEM FROM *BELOW* THE *CRYSTAL SURFACE* OF THE *CRUSHING MOUNTAINOUS ICEBERG*

THE END

CRIME-TIME

President and CEO—Stephen A. Geppi

Publisher—Russ Cochran

Dear Crime-Time

Looking at CRIME 19, I noticed that the last story, "About Phase", said "A Horror Suspense Story". Now as far as I can tell there were 14 horror stories in CRIME, in issue 3-16, all hosted by The Old Witch, I checked SHOCK #11, which was the 1st without a horror story. They came out the same month! Is it possible that by accident the horror story for SHOCK 11 was put in CRIME instead?

In other news, I am starting a newsletter based on EC comics. Subscription costs $5 a year, or individual issues can be bought for $1.50 a piece. 4 issues come out a year. The first issue should be out within 3 weeks. It includes, "Outside Literature in EC Comics," an index to WEIRD SCIENCE including an alphabetical listing of all stories, a guide to the art of each issue and the subjects of each story, my personal favorite stories and issues with a chance to vote for your favorite, the artist of the issue and more! Write to

Brian Shea
135 Florence RD
Waltham, MA 02154

We vote No on Proposition Mistake; but you're on to something. Word is SHOCK 11's "The Tryst" came from CRIME 19. CRIME's "Killer" and "Wined" seem to have been shoved to the front of the book and "Boomerang" inserted. "Phase" could have bounced to CRIME from the last spot in SHOCK, to accommodate SHOCK's Kamen-illustrated "Three's Company," an 8-pger shortened to 7-pg by author Al Feldstein. Whew! That would explain the "Horror" subhead on "About" and the clumsily-pasted on 'Crime' subhead on "Tryst" (all subheads were pasted on; we cleaned up "Tryst"'s for these comics). Oddly, The Old Witch is not implicated in any of this!

I just bought CRIME 23 and enjoyed it as always. The George Evans strangulation cover really stays with you long after you've first seen it. When I was a kid, my folks took me to Silver Springs, Florida in the early 1960s, and I have to reluctantly report that we did not see Mona's waterlogged corpse that day. Maybe Jerry had gotten out of jail and weighted it down again.

Crandall's "This'll Kill You!" story was a nice homage to the film noir classic D.O.A. However, the most bizarre yarn by far was Kamen's "Standing Room Only" I'm surprised that even EC got away with that one back in 1954. I would've thought that comics back then would not have touched the topic of cross-dressing with a ten foot pole. Did EC get in any special trouble as a result of that story?

Do you have any plans at all for reprinting EC's crime PictoFiction title, CRIME ILLUSTRATED? It would be a natural for all of us CRIME fans. Anyway, keep up the good work. Please print my address as I like to hear from fellow EC fans. EC for me,

David R. Burlington
3 Spur DR
Travelers Rest, SC 29690

Bob Hope, Cary Grant, The Three Stooges all cross-dressed in all-ages movies long before CRIME 23; so why not Carl? In fact, we have uncorroborated memory of a Boring Superman in a housedress and bandanna! (We'll continue to vaguely plan at least hardback reprints of all ILLUSTRATED material.)

Dear CRIME,

Re. issue #23. "This'll Kill You!" has a riveting, 'say-what!?' opening. The incredulous police are to be commended for hearing Gattling out. But, in the end, the Victor is really the loser – can't take an April Fool's joke. Well, maybe he did take it – to extremes! Today, Victor would enjoy his 15 minutes of fame, the talk show circuit, and book sales. In 1953, he'd probably get some sympathy, but also the electric chair.

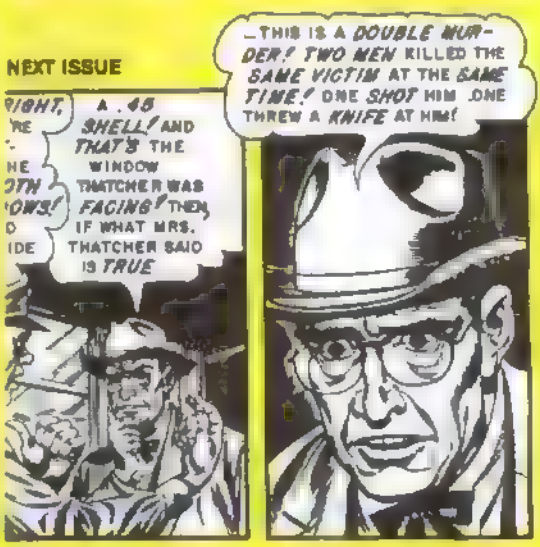
For "Standing Room Only", the title comes clear only at the ending. Why would a loser like Carl think he could outwit a trained professional like a lawyer, whose mind has been honed by years of challenging education and experience?

"Return Blow", like "This'll Kill You!", pivots on the EC protagonist's unwillingness to wait one day. The final explosive panel reminds us once again that 'The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft *ablaze*.'

In "Last Resort", surly Jerry is not such a bargain for poor Mona. It would be interesting to know who initiated Sheriff Cole's chat with waitress Jane Yarboro. Another twist could have had Jane marry Jerry and *then* turn him in, ending up with Mona's wealth. Please print address.

Bob Gorby
13153 Sunny LN
Camarillo, CA 93012

NEXT ISSUE


A .45 SHELL! AND THAT'S THE WINDOW THATCHER WAS FACING! THEN, IF WHAT MRS. THATCHER SAID IS TRUE
—THIS IS A DOUBLE MURDER! TWO MEN KILLED THE SAME VICTIM AT THE SAME TIME! ONE SHOT HIM ,ONE THREW A KNIFE AT HIM!

Carl could have been caught by a highly educated lawyer, or a 12 year old child. Who hasn't read the Twain version of this anecdote by sixth grade!

I've got an old HERO ILLUSTRATED EC SPECIAL (#21, March 95) that mentions a CRIME SUSPENSTORIES #15 published before #1, essentially making two different issues of CRIME with the same number. Are you going to reprint this issue or have you already? I didn't know about your reprints until they got to issue #10.

Exactly how far do you intend to go with your quarterly comic format reprints? I'd love to see everything from EC reprinted, so I could have a complete library. I can't afford the hardback b&w editions, and I much prefer having them as individual issues anyway. Are you going to give us such titles as BLACKSTONE THE MAGICIAN DETECTIVE FIGHTS CRIME (there's only one issue), FAT & SLAT, MOON GIRL/A MOON. . .A GIRL. .ROMANCE, the other Pre-Trend titles, and SHOCK ILLUSTRATED?

In the 1970s East Coast Comix [advertised] a 200 page book called HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950s which, according to the advert in their SHOCK #6 contained a previously unpublished EC tale by Angelo Torres. Do you have any plans to publish any of the stories that never appeared originally for censorship or other reasons? The missing yarn from the final INCREDIBLE SCI-FI for example? You could do them as a special one-shot or mini-series, calling it perhaps LOST IN THE CRYPT.

Why doesn't Gemstone publish any [comics] other than EC reprints? Will you? I'm curious, because with you being small press, I'd have thought that you'd like to print a good comic like BONE or REPLACEMENT GOD if a creator offered it to you. Alternatively, there are other great comics to reprint. In the early 80's in Britain there was an excellent E.C.-inspired horror anthology being published called SCREAM! It featured work by the likes of Steve Dillon, Simon Furman and Alan Moore. It should be reprinted by somebody, and made accessible to a new audience. Would you be interested in it?

And, finally, [I missed] HAUNT, FRONTLINE and CRIME #21. I can't get back issues over here, and the $10 overseas charge is too much postage for just three comics, is there anywhere you know that I can obtain them from over here?

R. N. Millward — Worcester, ENGLAND

The short version is that some copies of CRIME #1 (original, 1950 edition) were indicised #1 and some as #15. See CRIME 13 and 14 locols for details. Why not fill in your back issues of CRIME and HAUNT, et al, at the same time and get the most out of your shipping dollar?

We plan to reprint all New Trend and New Direction issues; and any PreTrend we've done in hardback i.e.: BLACKSTONE, FAT, MOON GIRL no and A MOON, MODERN LOVE, etc yes.

HORROR COMICS OF THE 1950s (Nostalgia Press, now a pricey rarity!) contained Torres' "An Eye for an Eye", bumped from INCSF and thus 'missing.' We restored it. But we love your title, LOST IN THE CRYPT!

After receiving deranged delight from reading your CRYPT, VAULT, HAUNT and SHOCK ANNUALS, I broke down and sent away for the first four CRIME ANNUALS as well. And, I must admit it was a real 'CRIME' I waited so long! The CRIME stories are equally as enjoyable as your superb horror comics, and I was happy to see that the Old Witch narrates a tawdry tale in each one. I guess I'll just have to check out the Sci-Fi and War comics also.

Enclosed is a cartoon for the Vault-Keeper so he won't think I'm a traitor (HEH-HEH!). And I eagerly await the VAULT ANNUAL #5!

Joe Grotenrath II — Alexandria, VA

For more thrilling variety, buy SHOCK back issues!

Also available this month are PIRACY , HAUNT and FRONTLINE COMBAT. Watch for CRYPT PANIC and another issue of PIRACY next month. Don't forget VAULT and TWO-FISTED coming soon! Get them at your local comic book shop or SUBSCRIBE (see our ad in this comic for details)!

BACK ISSUES: CRYPT #1, sold out; FRONT #1-4, $2 each; all others up thru issue #3, $1.50 each; CRYPT W/ SCI & SHOCK #4-16, and VAULT, W/ FAN, 2FIST, HAUNT and CRIME #4-15, $2 each. All others, $2.50 each (Latest issues: CRYPT, VAULT, 2FIST, HAUNT and CRIME are up to 23, FRONT to 12, PANIC to 5 and PIRACY to 3.).

Don't forget: the completed run of WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY/INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION, all 11 issues, #1-3 are $1.50 each, #4-11, $2 each, the completed run of SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES, all 18 issues, #1-3 are $1.50 each, #4-16 are $2.00 each and #17-18 are $2.50 each, the completed run of WEIRD SCIENCE, all 22 issues, #1-3 are $1.50 each, #4-16 are $2.00 each and #17-22 are $2.50 each and the completed run of WEIRD FANTASY, all 22 issues, #1-3 are $1.50 each, #4-15 are $2.00 each and #16-22 are $2.50 each.

Add $5 per order ($10 outside US) for S&H.

[redacted]
CRIME
GEMSTONE
POB 469
WEST PLAINS MO 65775

THIS COMIC REPRINTS

CRIME SUSPENSTORIES #24 (AUG/SEP 1954)

COVER by George Evans	
"Double-Crossed"	Reed Crandall
"Crushed Ice"	Jack Kamen
"Food for Thought"	Joe Orlando
"More Blessed to Give."	Bernie Krigstein

We welcome letters of comment. We cannot promise to acknowledge, publish or answer letters. We edit for clarity, accuracy and length. We automatically withhold street address and zip code unless you clearly state you wish them published. Pseudonyms may be used if you provide us with your authentic name and address. We attempt to acknowledge publication of letters; to do so we need your address on the individual letter.

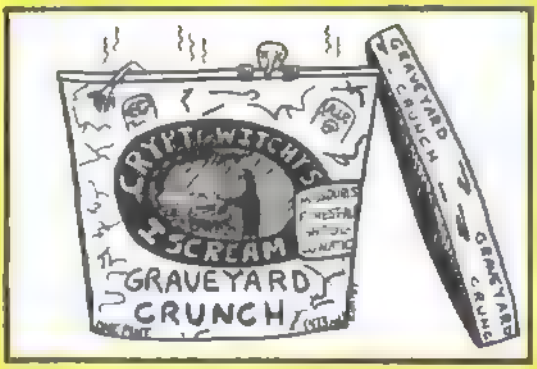
Hide in plain sight! The perennial advise never worked better than for this trotting rotter, this bounding blighter, this blighted bounder, this – egad, indeed! But, thanks to the criminal-corpse's fingers falling apart at the touch, the chap in the high water trousers can retrieve his intact it slime-rimed comics by tracing the thief's fetid foot-prints. This security camera view provided by Grant Smith, age 14, Stamford, CT. A snatch and grab start to THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S PAGE OF . .

FINE ARTS #67

Dear CK,

Below is my illo of a product NOT coming soon to a store near you! Where's Vaulty you may ask? What do think gives it it's crunch!

Barry McCollum — Alton, IL



Store in a ghoul place. Serve at broom temperature. Contains only 60,000 grams of fat(head)! –CK

Dear Crippie,

Since you have had the ghoulness to print several of my poems I am submitting another one. No, this poem is not about you. It concerns some other poor pathetic creature. Can you guess who?

Wendy Gunther — Colchester, VT

THE MONSTER

I do not know what thing I am,
How I came into being
What monstrous curse
Pronounced my birth,
Through whose eyes I am seeing.

Whose mortal sins torment my soul,
What horrors never told me
What savage grace
Designed my face,
What unmarked grave enfolds me.

Whose hand will bless
And bring me rest,
Who'll not run from me screaming
What shape will come
To wake me from
This nightmare I am dreaming

Let's see, could it be – FM? And I don't mean Forrestacker Man! Looking over this poem, I dub thee Bizarro-William Blake! Higher praise hath no GhouLunatic. –CK

Send your contribs (not returnable, not too long, not too big, legible doublespaced text &/or bold black art. Warning...we edit) to:

THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S

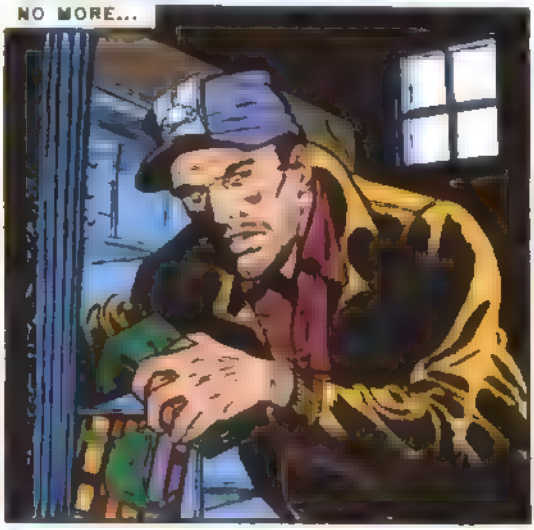
PAGE OF FINE ARTS

We welcome contributions. We cannot promise to return, acknowledge or publish contributions. We edit for clarity, accuracy and size. We automatically withhold street address and zip code unless you clearly state you wish them published. We attempt to acknowledge publication, so do so we need your address on the individual contribution.

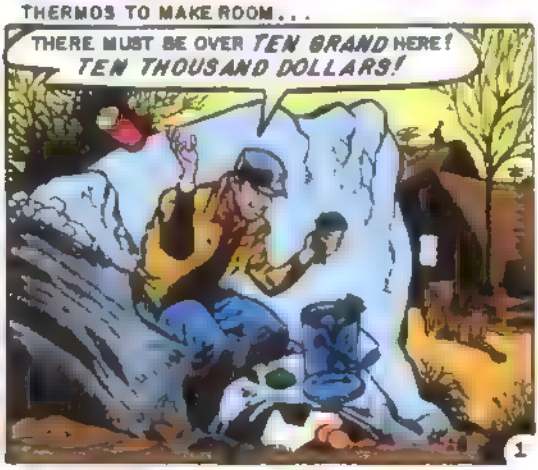
FOOD for THOUGHT

AT THAT TIME OF MORNING, MIST STILL CLUNG TO THE MOUNTAINS... ROLLING QUIETLY AMONG THE RUGGED ROCKS, WAFTING GENTLY OVER THE MINE SHAFT, SLIPPING STEALTHILY INTO THE PAYMASTER'S OFFICE FOR A QUICK LOOK-SEE IN THE MANNER OF A CURIOUS CHILD. SOON, THE MIST WOULD LEAP FROM THE SUN'S WARMTH, LEAVING THE MOUNTAINS WET AND SHINING BLACK. SOON THE MEN WOULD COME... THE MINERS. THEY WOULD TAKE A LAST QUICK GLANCE AT THE BRIGHT MORNING SUN, THEN DISAPPEAR INTO THE STYGIAN GLOOM OF THE SHAFT. BUT IT WAS STILL TOO EARLY. EVEN KIP LORUS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN AT THE MINE SO EARLY HAD NOT HIS OLD MAN BEEN NEEDLING HIM AGAIN. AND HE WOULD NOT HAVE SEEN THE OPEN DOOR TO THE PAYROLL OFFICE, THE OPEN SAFE WITH THE PAYROLL IN PLAIN SIGHT, THE OPEN INVITATION. HE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THERE BEATING THE PAYMASTER'S BRAINS OUT...

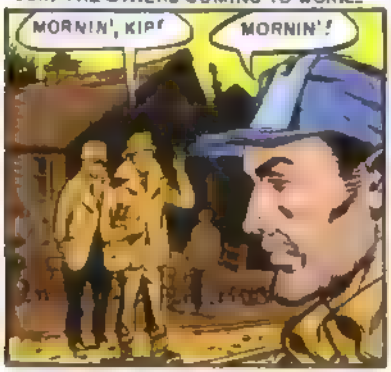
KIP DROPPED THE BLOODY WEAPON BESIDE THE BODY, STEPPED TO THE SAFE AND PLUNGED HIS NERVOUS HANDS IN AGAIN AND AGAIN. HE SNATCHED UP THE LARGER BILLS ONLY... THE FIFTIES, THE TWENTIES, THE TENS... AND STUFFED THEM INTO HIS POCKETS TILL THEY COULD HOLD NO MORE...



THEN HE LEFT. HE WALKED BACK TOWARD TOWN. HE CLIMBED BEHIND SOME ROCKS, EMPTIED HIS LUNCHBOX, AND STUFFED THE BILLS HE'D STOLEN INTO IT. ALL THE WHILE HIS HANDS SHOOK FROM THE EXCITEMENT OF THE MURDER AND HAVING SO MUCH MONEY. HE EVEN HAD TO FLING AWAY HIS THERMOS TO MAKE ROOM...

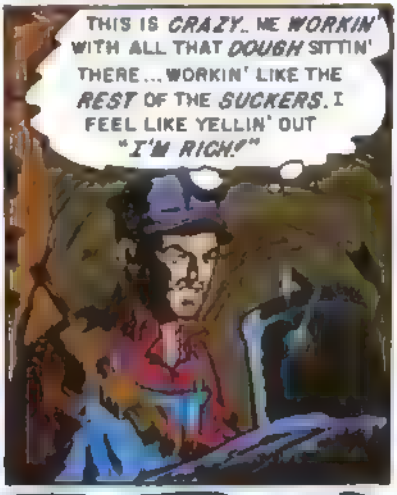


KIP'S FATHER...HIS FOUR YOUNGER BROTHERS. THEY COULD GO ON BREAKING THEIR BACKS IN THE OTHER SUMMIT MINES. THEY COULD GROW OLD BEFORE THEIR TIME. THEY'D NEVER BE RICH LIKE KIP WAS NOW. KIP WAS THINKING THAT WHEN THE WHISTLE BLEW AND ITS ECHO WAS STILL BOUNCING FROM BOULDER TO BOULDER AS KIP CLIMBED DOWN TO JOIN THE OTHERS COMING TO WORK...

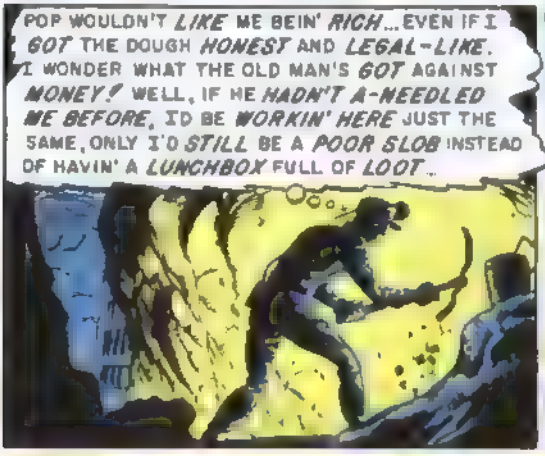


THEY WERE SOBER HARD-WORKING MEN, THESE HUMAN MOLES WHO LEFT THE SUNLIGHT TO CLAW A LIVING OUT OF THE BLACK ROCK CATACOMBS EIGHT HUNDRED FEET BELOW GROUND. KIP STOOD AMONG THEM, HIS LUNCH-BOX HANGING HEAVY IN HIS HAND...

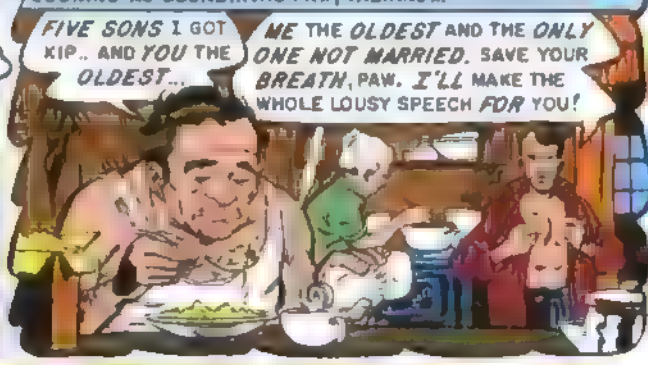
KIP CHECKED IN WITH THE TIME-KEEPER, SELECTED A PICK, AND WENT TO THE PART OF THE TUNNEL ASSIGNED TO HIM BY THE FOREMAN. HE PUT HIS LUNCHBOX DOWN WHERE HE COULD KEEP AN EYE ON IT...



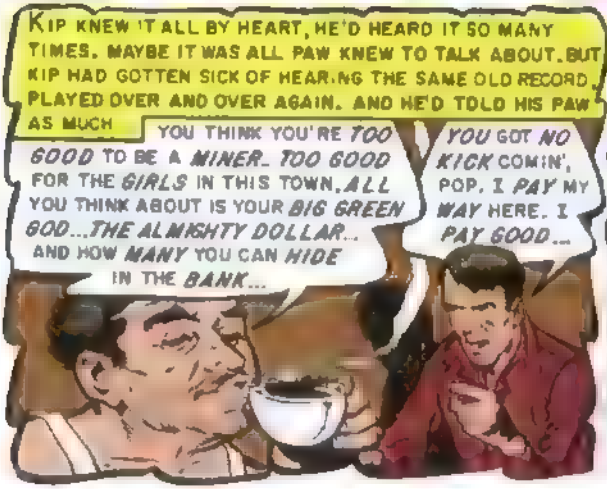
KIP THOUGHT ABOUT HIS FATHER...


POP WOULDN'T LIKE ME BEIN' RICH... EVEN IF I GOT THE DOUGH HONEST AND LEGAL-LIKE. I WONDER WHAT THE OLD MAN'S GOT AGAINST MONEY! WELL, IF HE HADN'T A-NEEDLED ME BEFORE, I'D BE WORKIN' HERE JUST THE SAME, ONLY I'D STILL BE A POOR SLOB INSTEAD OF HAVIN' A LUNCHBOX FULL OF LOOT..

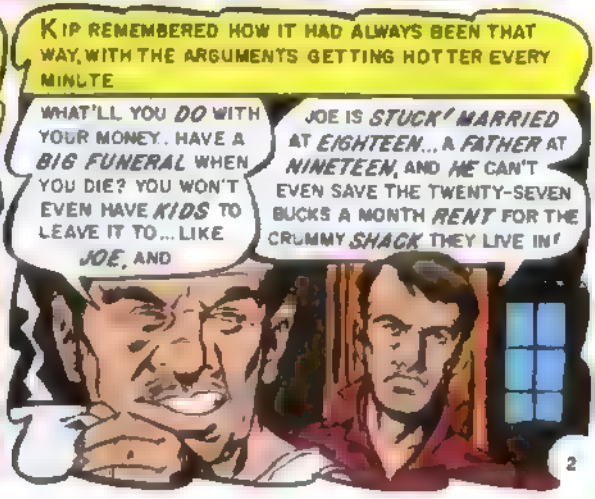
KIP THOUGHT ABOUT EARLIER THAT MORNING, WHEN IT WAS STILL DARK OUT IN THE LITTLE VALLEY MINING TOWN. HE THOUGHT ABOUT SITTING AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE IN THAT LITTLE SOOT-STAINED BOX OF A HOUSE... HIS MA, COOKING AS USUAL... HIS PAW, TALKING...

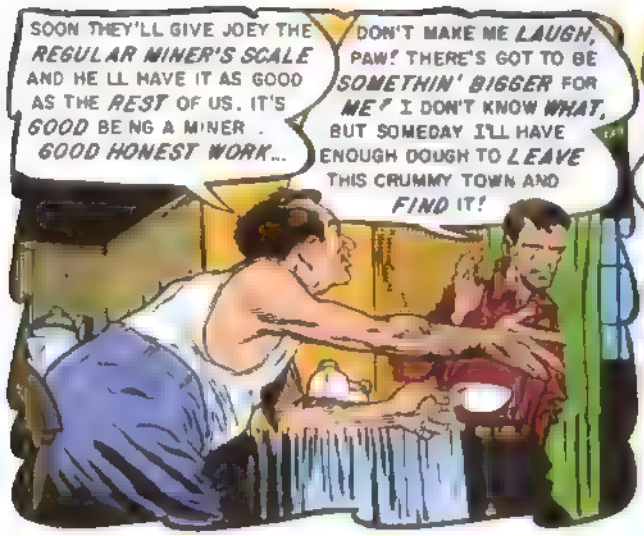

FIVE SONS I GOT KIP.. AND YOU THE OLDEST...
ME THE OLDEST AND THE ONLY ONE NOT MARRIED. SAVE YOUR BREATH, PAW. I'LL MAKE THE WHOLE LOUSY SPEECH FOR YOU!

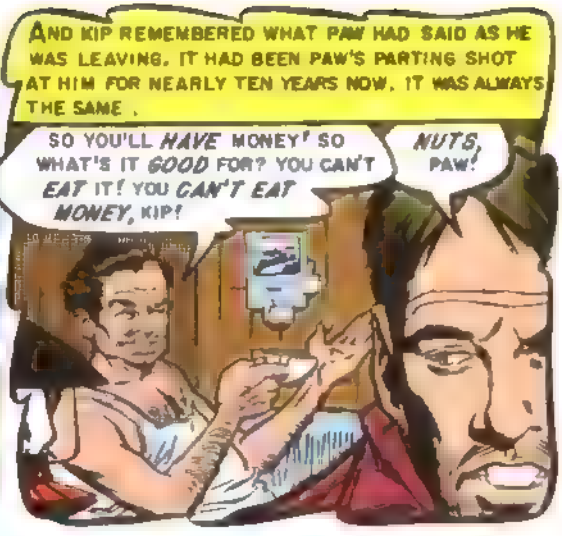
KIP KNEW IT ALL BY HEART, HE'D HEARD IT SO MANY TIMES. MAYBE IT WAS ALL PAW KNEW TO TALK ABOUT. BUT KIP HAD GOTTEN SICK OF HEARING THE SAME OLD RECORD PLAYED OVER AND OVER AGAIN. AND HE'D TOLD HIS PAW AS MUCH


YOU THINK YOU'RE TOO GOOD TO BE A MINER.. TOO GOOD FOR THE GIRLS IN THIS TOWN. ALL YOU THINK ABOUT IS YOUR BIG GREEN GOD...THE ALMIGHTY DOLLAR... AND HOW MANY YOU CAN HIDE IN THE BANK...
YOU GOT NO KICK COMIN', POP. I PAY MY WAY HERE. I PAY GOOD...

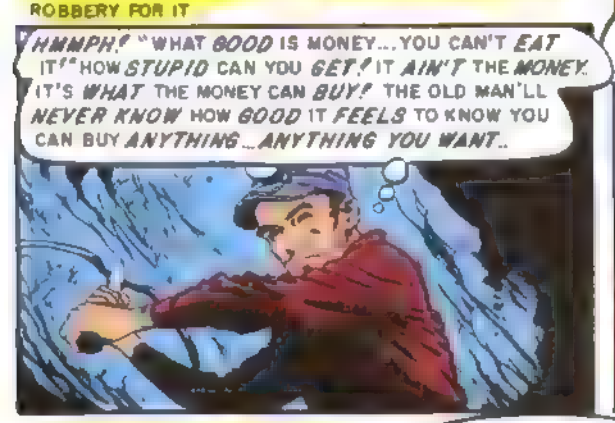
KIP REMEMBERED HOW IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY, WITH THE ARGUMENTS GETTING HOTTER EVERY MINUTE


WHAT'LL YOU DO WITH YOUR MONEY. HAVE A BIG FUNERAL WHEN YOU DIE? YOU WON'T EVEN HAVE KIDS TO LEAVE IT TO... LIKE JOE, AND
JOE IS STUCK MARRIED AT EIGHTEEN... A FATHER AT NINETEEN, AND HE CAN'T EVEN SAVE THE TWENTY-SEVEN BUCKS A MONTH RENT FOR THE CRUMMY SHACK THEY LIVE IN!

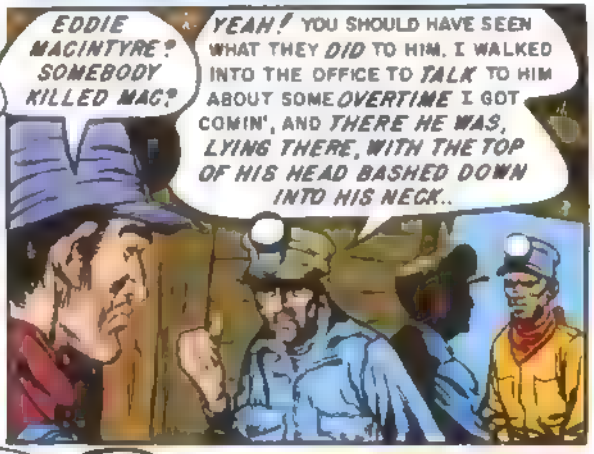

SOON THEY'LL GIVE JOEY THE REGULAR MINER'S SCALE AND HE LL HAVE IT AS GOOD AS THE REST OF US. IT'S GOOD BE NG A MINER . GOOD HONEST WORK...
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH, PAW! THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHIN' BIGGER FOR ME! I DON'T KNOW WHAT, BUT SOMEDAY I'LL HAVE ENOUGH DOUGH TO LEAVE THIS CRUMMY TOWN AND FIND IT!


AND KIP REMEMBERED WHAT PAW HAD SAID AS HE WAS LEAVING. IT HAD BEEN PAW'S PARTING SHOT AT HIM FOR NEARLY TEN YEARS NOW. IT WAS ALWAYS THE SAME .
SO YOU'LL HAVE MONEY! SO WHAT'S IT GOOD FOR? YOU CAN'T EAT IT! YOU CAN'T EAT MONEY, KIP!
NUTS, PAW!

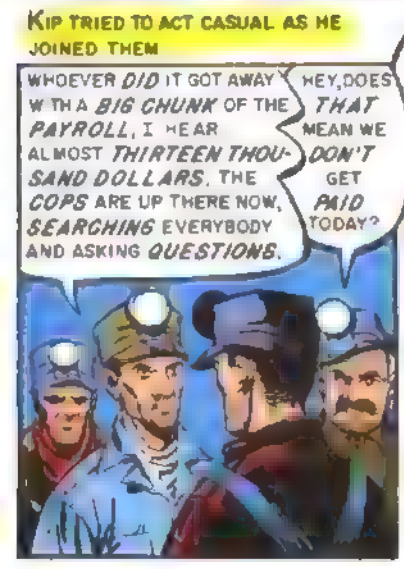
...AND SO, BECAUSE HIS PAW'S WORDS HAD ANGERED KIP MORE THAN USUAL, HE'D STORMED OUT EARLIER THAT MORNING, COME DOWN TO THE MINE, SEEN WHAT HE'D SEEN...A WAY OUT... AND COMMITTED MURDER AND ROBBERY FOR IT

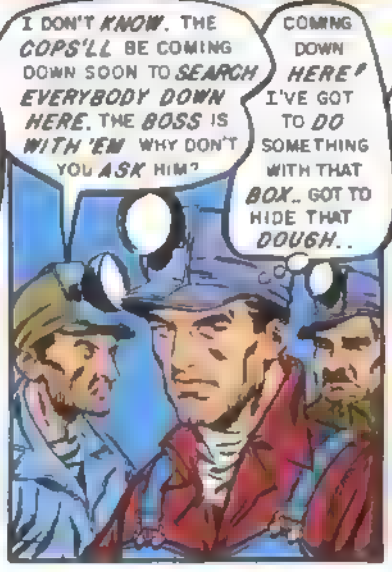

HMMPH! "WHAT GOOD IS MONEY...YOU CAN'T EAT IT!" HOW STUPID CAN YOU GET! IT AIN'T THE MONEY. IT'S WHAT THE MONEY CAN BUY! THE OLD MAN'LL NEVER KNOW HOW GOOD IT FEELS TO KNOW YOU CAN BUY ANYTHING...ANYTHING YOU WANT..

KIP WAS SUDDENLY AWARE OF EXCITED VOICES DOWN TOWARD THE SHAFT. HE PUT HIS PICK ON HIS LUNCH-BOX AND MOVED THROUGH THE TUNNEL...


EDDIE MACINTYRE? SOMEBODY KILLED MAC?
YEAH! YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN WHAT THEY DID TO HIM. I WALKED INTO THE OFFICE TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT SOME OVERTIME I GOT COMIN', AND THERE HE WAS, LYING THERE, WITH THE TOP OF HIS HEAD BASHED DOWN INTO HIS NECK..

KIP TRIED TO ACT CASUAL AS HE JOINED THEM

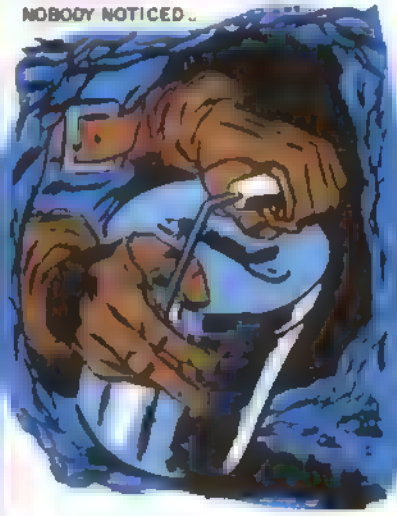

WHOEVER DID IT GOT AWAY W TH A BIG CHUNK OF THE PAYROLL, I HEAR ALMOST THIRTEEN THOU-SAND DOLLARS. THE COPS ARE UP THERE NOW, SEARCHING EVERYBODY AND ASKING QUESTIONS.
HEY, DOES THAT MEAN WE DON'T GET PAID TODAY?


I DON'T KNOW. THE COPS'LL BE COMING DOWN SOON TO SEARCH EVERYBODY DOWN HERE. THE BOSS IS WITH 'EM WHY DON'T YOU ASK HIM?
COMING DOWN HERE! I'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING WITH THAT BOX.. GOT TO HIDE THAT DOUGH..

KIP HURRIED BACK DOWN THE TUNNEL TO WHERE HE'D BEEN DIGGING...

KIP WORKED FEVERISHLY...HACKING A HOLE INTO THE MINE WALL... HIS HEART BEATING LIKE A TRIP-HAMMER, MORE FROM FEAR THAN FROM EXERTION...

BUT HE DUG THE HOLE AND SHOVED THE LUNCHBOX IN AND PRAYED NOBODY NOTICED..



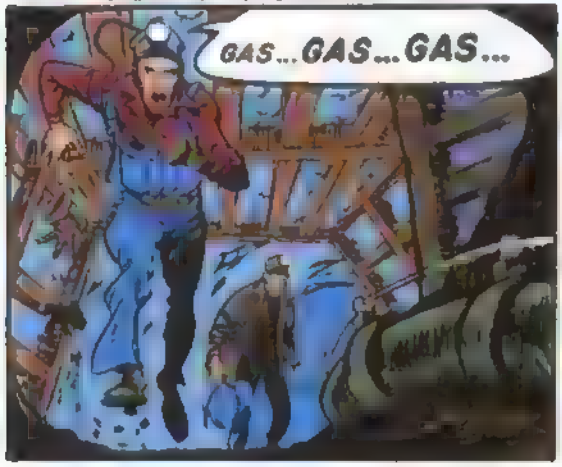
HE TRIED NOT TO LOOK AT THE HIDING PLACE, BUT IT KEPT DRAWING HIS EYES BACK. IT SEEMED TO STAND OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB...

HE LOOKED AROUND, WIDE EYED...

THEY'LL *FIND IT* AND *KNOW* IT'S *MY BOX!* I'VE GOT TO HAVE *TIME* TO MAKE A *BETTER HIDING PLACE.* I'VE GOT TO *STOP* THE COPS FROM *COMING DOWN HERE* FOR A WHILE...
S'MATTER, LORUS? YOU *SICK,* OR SOMETHIN'?

SUDDENLY, A CRUDE KIND OF CRAFTINESS GOT JUMBLED UP WITH THE PANIC IN KIP'S MIND. HE HEARD THE QUESTION AND IT STEERED HIM TOWARD AN ANSWER.. AN ANSWER THAT WOULD EMPTY THE MINE AND GIVE HIM THE TIME HE'D NEED

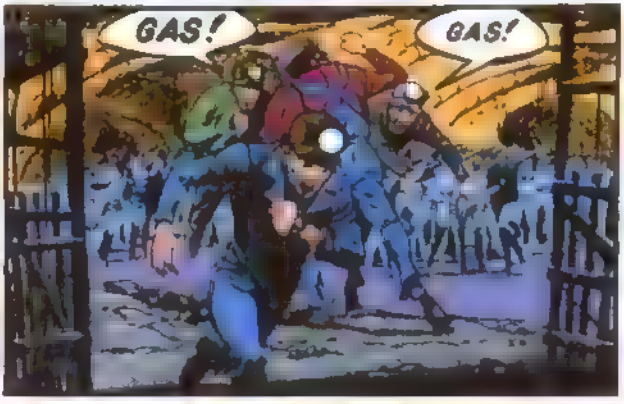
HE STUMBLED DOWN THE TUNNEL TOWARD THE SHAFT SCREAMING THE TERRORIZING WORD...



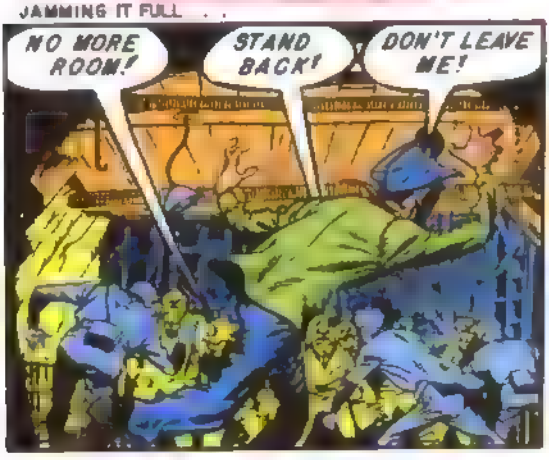
HE REACHED THE ALARM BELL...PRESSED THE BUTTON. THE STRIDENT SOUNDS OF THE ALARM MINGLED WITH THE HARSH SHRIEKS OF THE FEAR-DRIVEN MURDERER.

THE RAUCOUS CACOPHONY OF TERROR STILLED THE STEEL SYMPHONY OF PICKS AND SHOVELS AND DRILLS. THE MEN HUNG BACK FOR THAT ONE INSTANT OF UNCERTAINTY AND UNBELIEVING AS THE ALARM ECHOED THROUGH THE TUNNELS . . .

THEN TOOLS WERE HURLED ASIDE, AND THE ONE-WORD CRY THAT WARNED OF SUDDEN DEATH BLURTED FROM THEIR LIPS AS THEY RAN. IT ECHOED LIKE THE WHISPER OF DOOM INTO THE DEEPEST BOWELS OF THE EARTH. KIP HAD TO FIGHT HIS WAY BACK THROUGH THE STAMPEDE HE'D STARTED..



MEN THOUGHT OF HOPELESS, DEBT-RIDDEN LIVES.. AND STILL THEY WANTED TO LIVE. THEY PUSHED AND SHOVED AND CURSED TOWARD THE LIFT. . . JAMMING IT FULL . .



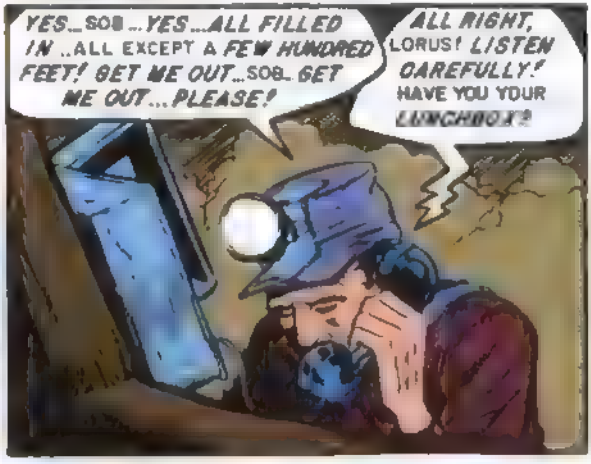
THE SWOLLEN HERD JAMMED AGAINST THE SHORING POLES.. PUSHED AGAINST THE SUPPORTING STUDS. JOSTLED AND SHOVED ..WAITING THE ETERNITY FOR THE LIFT TO RETURN. KIP STOOD BACK IN THE TUNNEL, WATCHING THE MELEE SMILING!

THE LIFT RETURNED. THE MEN CLAMORED ABOARD, RELEASING THEIR PRESSURE ON THE SUPPORTS. WITH AN ANGRY SICKENING GROAN, THE TUNNEL ROOF SAGGED... AND FELL .

EARTH AND ROCK AND DEBRIS CASCADED DOWNWARD AT THE TUNNEL MOUTH, STARTING A CHAIN REACTION THAT MOVED BACK ALONG THE TUNNEL, CAVING IN THE ROOF, SEALING ONE MAN INTO A SILENT, SOLITARY, SELF-MADE TOMB .

KIP STOOD IN THE TWO HUNDRED FOOT SEGMENT OF THE TUNNEL SEALED OFF BY THE TONS OF DEBRIS AND ROCKS AND EARTH . A WILD, SELF-TRAPPED, HOWLING ANIMAL. AND THE IMPRISONING WALLS HURLED HIS SHRIEKS BACK AT HIM, MOCKINGLY .

HE REMEMBERED THE PHONE, RUSHED TO IT, RANG THE SURFACE, CRIED INTO IT LIKE A BABY...


YES...SOB ...YES...ALL FILLED IN ..ALL EXCEPT A FEW HUNDRED FEET! GET ME OUT...SOB.. GET ME OUT... PLEASE!
ALL RIGHT, LORUS! LISTEN CAREFULLY! HAVE YOU YOUR LUNCHBOX?

KIP LOOKED AT THE NICHE HE'D DUG IN THE WALL. THE ROCKS HE'D USED TO COVER IT HAD FALLEN AWAY. THE LUNCHBOX HUNG OUT, CRAZILY

MY ..MY LUNCHBOX? W-WHY?
IT'LL TAKE US OVER A WEEK TO REACH YOU, LORUS. STRETCH YOUR FOOD. CONSERVE WHAT LIQUIDS YOU HAVE. .KEEP YOUR THERMOS TIGHTLY CORKED...

KIP TOOK THE LUNCHBOX AND OPENED IT. HE STARED AT THE MONEY. HE MADE THREE TRIES AT TALKING BEFORE HE UTTERED A SOUND. IT FINALLY CAME OUT, SICK AND SHAKING ..

THE VOICE FROM THE RECEIVER WAS THE VOICE OF DOOM ...

WITH NOTHING TO EAT OR DRINK... NOTHING AT ALL ...YOU COULDN'T LAST FOUR DAYS! BUT WHAT ARE YOU WORRYING ABOUT? YOU GOT YOUR LUNCHBOX! NOW LISTEN! WE'LL START DIGGING...

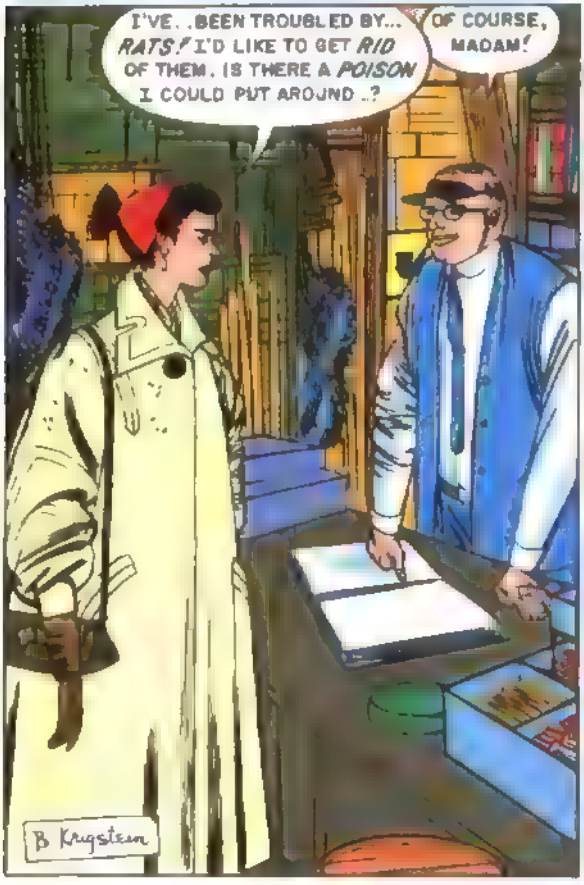
KIP HUNG UP. THERE WAS NO USE LISTENING ANYMORE, AND OUT OF THE BLACKNESS... THE LONELY EMPTY BLACKNESS. .CAME A HOLLOW VOICE TO TAUNT AND TORMENT HIM ...

THEY REACHED KIP LORUS AT THE END OF THE SEVENTH DAY. IN HIS FINAL HYSTERICAL STARVING HOURS, HE'D TRIED AND FOUND HIS FATHER WAS RIGHT. BITS OF SEMI-CHEWED BILLS LAY IN POOLS OF DRIED-UP BILE AROUND HIM. A TWENTY HUNG FROM HIS CRACKED AND DRIED MOUTH

MORE BLESSED TO GIVE...

MOLLY AND *STANLEY TALBOT* HAD BEEN MARRIED A *LONG TIME*. WHEN THEY'D STOOD BEFORE THE PREACHER ELEVEN MISERABLE YEARS AGO, THEY'D PROMISED TO *"LOVE, HONOR,* AND *OBEY* EACH OTHER TILL *DEATH ..."* WELL, THE *"LOVING"* EACH OTHER WENT *FIRST*... THEN THE *"HONORING"*... AND FINALLY, THE *"OBEYING"*. THIS, THEN, IS THE STORY OF THE *"DEATH"* PORTION OF THEIR MUTUAL PROMISE. THIS IS THE STORY OF *PLANNED MURDER*. THIS IS THE STORY OF *TWO INDIVIDUALS* AND THE BEST WAY TO *TELL* THEIR STORY *IS* INDIVIDUALLY. SO ..

MOLLY WAS SICK AND TIRED OF STANLEY! THE HONEY-MOON HAD ENDED LONG AGO FOR HER. THE SCHOOL-GIRL PASSIONS SHE'D FELT FOR HIM HAD VANISHED WITH THE UNGLAMOROUS FAMILIARITY OF TWO PEOPLE LIVING TOGETHER IN MARRIAGE. SHE WAS SICK OF PICKING UP AFTER HIM, SICK OF HIS SLOPPY HABITS, HIS LETHARGY, HIS LACK OF AMBITION. SHE BOUGHT THE POISON IN A HARDWARE STORE, USING THE LAME EXCUSE...



STANLEY WAS SICK AND TIRED OF MOLLY! THE HONEY-MOON HAD ENDED LONG AGO FOR HIM. THE MARRIAGE THAT HAD PROMISED TO BE A PARADISE ON EARTH HAD CHANGED TO ONE OF DISILLUSIONMENT AND DISCONTENT. HE WAS SICK OF HER NAGGING HIM, SICK OF HER CRITICISM, HER AGGRESSIVENESS, HER LACK OF WARMTH. HE BOUGHT THE BOMB FROM A SHADY CHARACTER WHO'D BEEN RECOMMENDED TO HIM..

IT WORKS SOMETHIN' LIKE THEM *MINES* THEY USED DURIN' THE WAR. A LITTLE *PRESSURE* AND *WHAAM!* JUST PULL THIS *SAFETY PIN*... AND IT'S *READY*..
GOOD! *GOOD!* A *TIME BOMB* WOULDN'T *HELP ME! THIS* IS *PERFECT*...

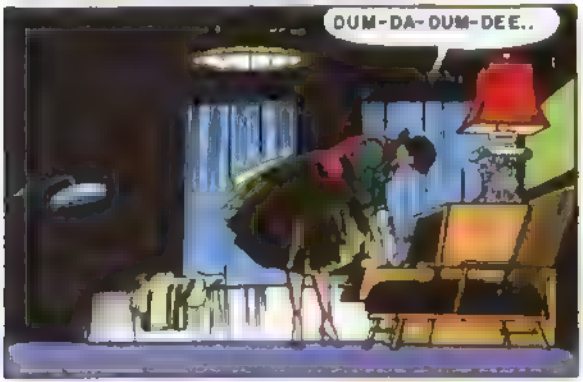
MOLLY'S NEXT PURCHASE WAS A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY AT THE LOCAL LIQUOR STORE...

WOULD YOU *WRAP IT AS A GIFT?* IT'S MY *HUSBAND'S FAVORITE BRAND* AND I'D LIKE TO *GIVE* IT TO HIM FOR OUR *ANNIVERSARY!*
AS YOU WISH, MRS. TALBOT!

STANLEY STOPPED OFF AT THE LOCAL BAKERY FOR HIS NEXT PURCHASE...

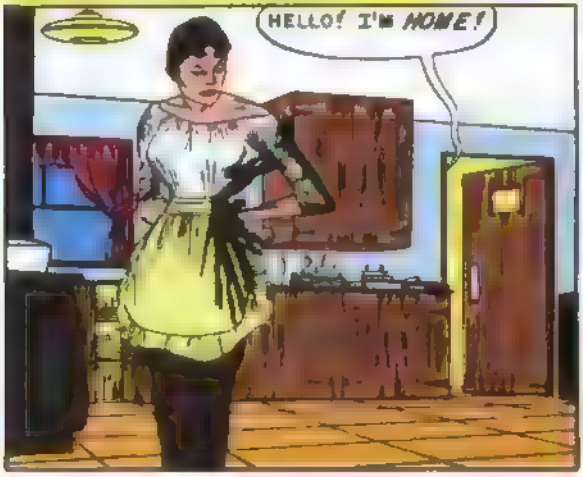
I'D LIKE TO ORDER AN *ANNIVERSARY CAKE*... TO *SURPRISE MY WIFE*. ONE LIKE...LET ME SEE...LIKE *THAT* ONE!... *THAT'S BIG ENOUGH!*
OF COURSE, MR TALBOT!

MOLLY BROUGHT THE BOTTLE OF WHISKEY AND THE RAT POISON HOME THAT EVENING AND HID THEM CAREFULLY IN HER ROOM...DOWN DEEP IN A LINGERIE-FILLED DRESSER DRAWER. STANLEY NEVER WENT THROUGH HER LINGERIE DRAWER, SO THE BOTTLE AND THE POISON WOULD BE SAFE UNTIL SHE COULD GET TO THEM...



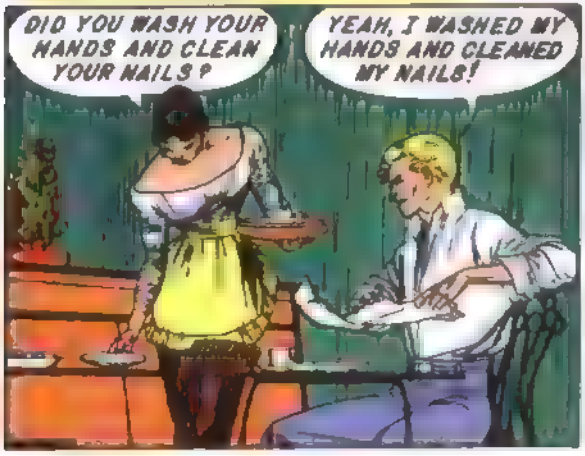
STANLEY, MEANWHILE, WAS HIDING THE BOMB AND THE CAKE ..IN THE GARAGE. IT WAS COLD IN THE GARAGE AND THE CAKE WOULD KEEP WELL THERE. MOLLY NEVER CAME TO THE GARAGE, SO THE BOMB AND THE CAKE WOULD BE SAFE UNTIL HE COULD GET TO THEM .

THEN MOLLY WENT INTO THE KITCHEN AND STARTED PREPARING DINNER AS USUAL...



AND STANLEY CAME IN THE FRONT DOOR AS IF HE WERE COMING HOME FROM WORK AS USUAL...

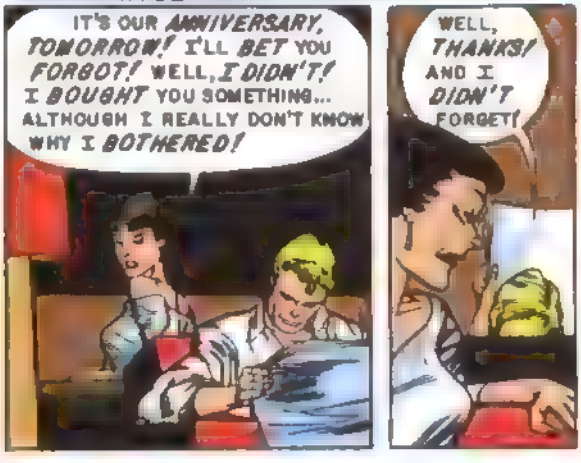
MOLLY TRIED NOT TO ACT ANY DIFFERENTLY THAN USUAL AS SHE DISHED OUT DINNER. SHE NAGGED STANLEY LIKE ALWAYS..



AND STANLEY TRIED NOT TO ACT ANY DIFFERENTLY EITHER...

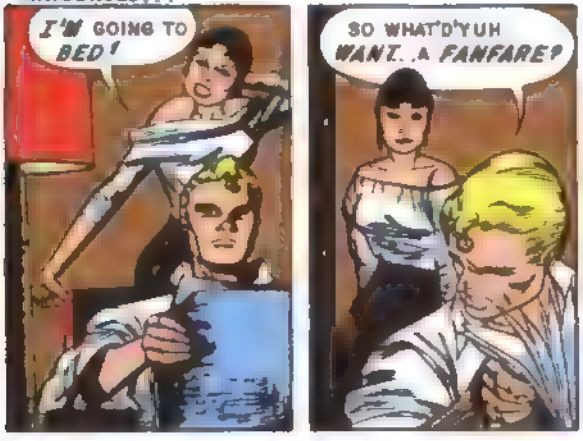
WELL, THE LEAST YOU COULD DO IS WAIT FOR ME TO SIT DOWN BEFORE YOU START STUFFING YOURSELF...
WHAT'D'YUH WANT ME TO DO .LOSE MY APPETITE?

AFTER DINNER, MOLLY DECIDED TO LET STANLEY KNOW ABOUT HER PURCHASE OF COURSE, SHE DION'T TELL HIM THE WHOLE STORY...

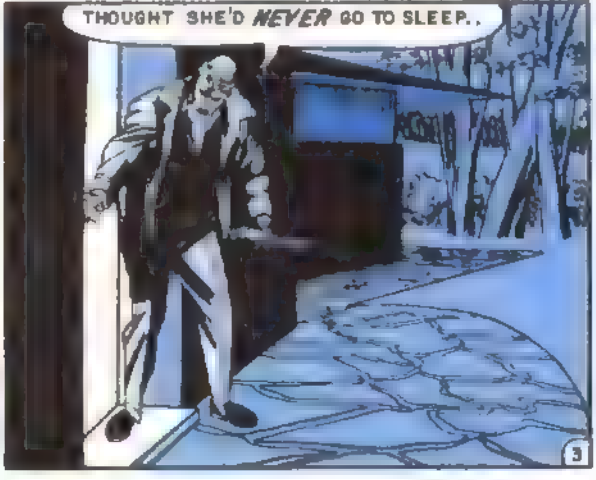

IT'S OUR ANNIVERSARY, TOMORROW! I'LL BET YOU FORGOT! WELL, I DIDN'T! I BOUGHT YOU SOMETHING... ALTHOUGH I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHY I BOTHERED!
WELL, THANKS! AND I DIDN'T FORGET!

SO STANLEY DECIDED TO LET MOLLY KNOW ABOUT HIS PURCHASE. HE NEGLECTED TO FILL IN THE DETAILS, ALSO...

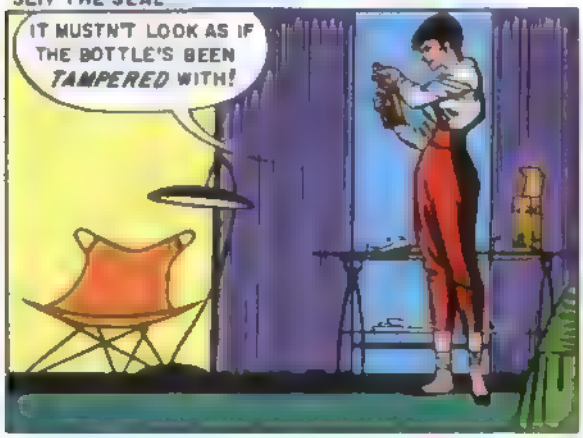
ALL EVENING, MOLLY WAS ANXIOUS TO GET TO HER ROOM AND PREPARE HER GIFT TO STANLEY. FINALLY, ATER TWO HOURS OF OPPRESSIVE SILENCE SHE ANNOUNCED...



THE MOMENT MOLLY'D CROSSED THE HALL AND SLAMMED INTO HER ROOM, STANLEY WAS OUT THE BACK DOOR.

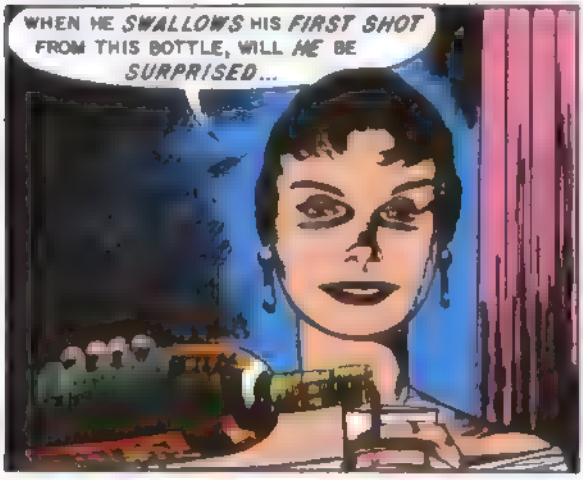


MOLLY REMOVED THE WHISKEY BOTTLE AND THE RAT POISON FROM THE LINGERIE DRAWER. CAREFULLY, SHE UNWRAPPED THE WHISKEY BOTTLE AND EXPERTLY SLIT THE SEAL...



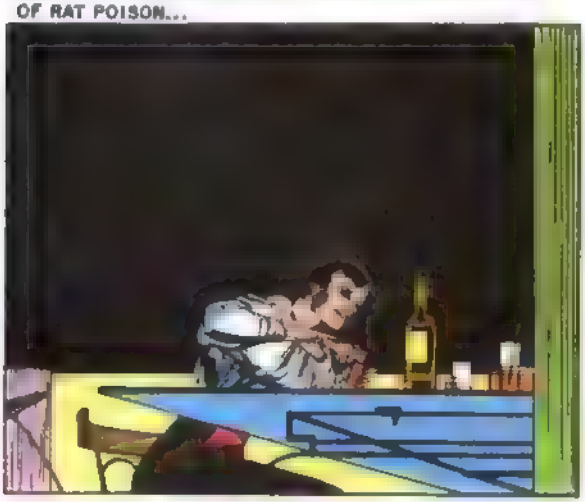
STANLEY REMOVED THE CAKE AND THE BOMB FROM WHERE HE'D HIDDEN THEM IN THE GARAGE. CAREFULLY, HE UNWRAPPED THE CAKE AND EXPERTLY SLIT IT HORIZONTALLY...

MOLLY POURED A LITTLE OF THE WHISKEY OFF INTO A GLASS...

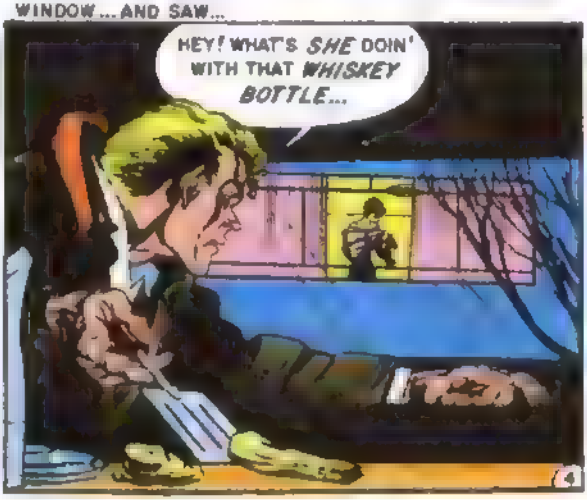


STANLEY HOLLOWED OUT THE CENTER OF THE BOTTOM LAYER.

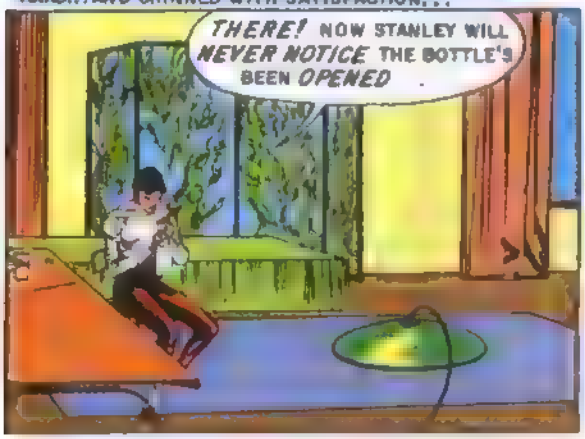
MOLLY UNSCREWED THE CAP FROM THE SMALL VIAL OF RAT POISON...



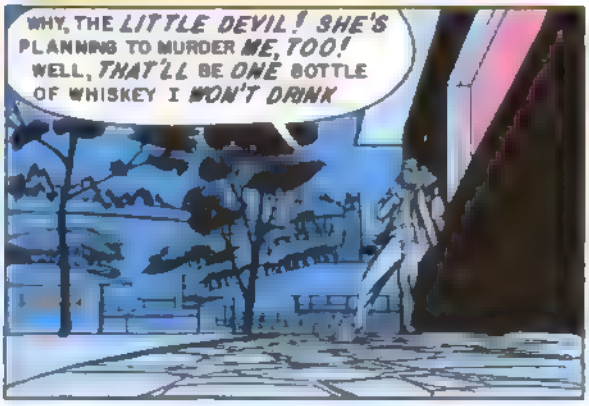
STANLEY HAPPENED TO LOOK UP..THROUGH THE GARAGE WINDOW...AND SAW...



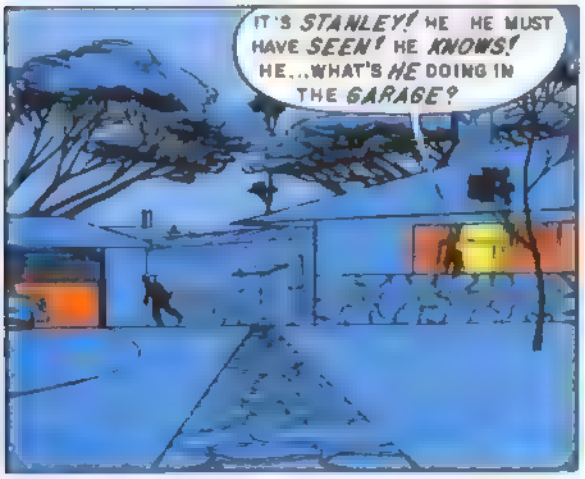
MOLLY FINISHED POURING THE CONTENTS OF THE VIAL OF RAT POISON INTO THE WHISKEY BOTTLE. SHE REPLACED THE CORK...DAMPENED THE SEAL...PRESSED HARD...AND GRINNED WITH SATISFACTION...



STANLEY HAD SEEN IT ALL. HE'D COME OUT OF THE GARAGE AND CREPT TO THE RANCH-HOUSE BEDROOM WINDOW AND PEERED IN. HE'D SEEN MOLLY POUR THE RAT POISON... SEEN HER RE-SEAL THE BOTTLE...EVERYTHING...

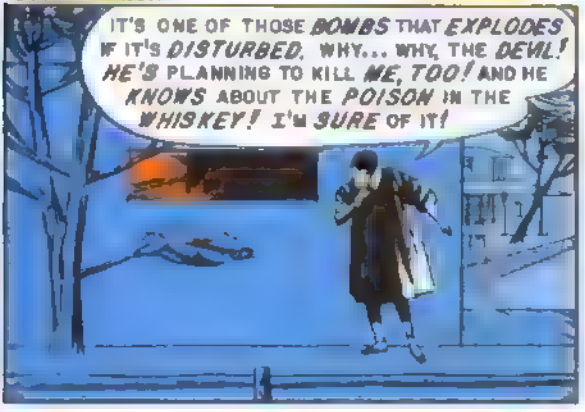


MOLLY HEARD THE CRUNCHING OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM WINDOW. SHE PEERED OUT...

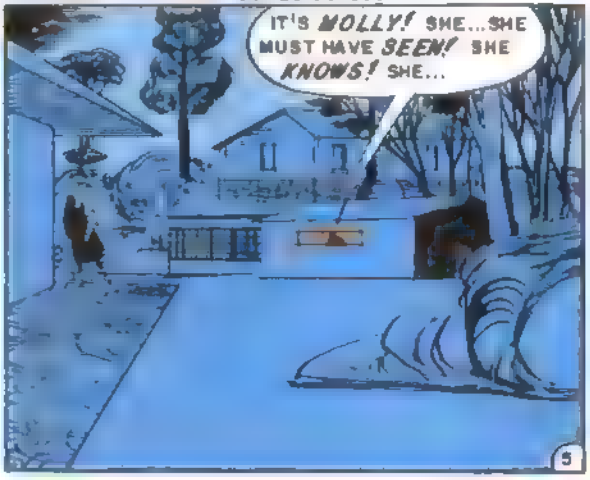


STANLEY FINISHED HIS JOB. HE PLACED THE BOMB INTO THE HOLLOWED-OUT CAKE LAYER... PULLED THE SAFETY PIN... PLACED THE ICED TOP LAYER BACK ON CAREFULLY, AND SMOOTHED OUT THE BUTTER CREAM SIDES...

MOLLY HAD SEEN IT ALL. SHE'D COME OUT OF THE HOUSE AND CREPT TO THE GARAGE WINDOW AND PEERED IN. SHE'D SEEN STANLEY PLACE THE BOMB...SEEN HIM PULL THE PIN...SEEN HIM RE-SEAL THE CAKE... EVERYTHING..

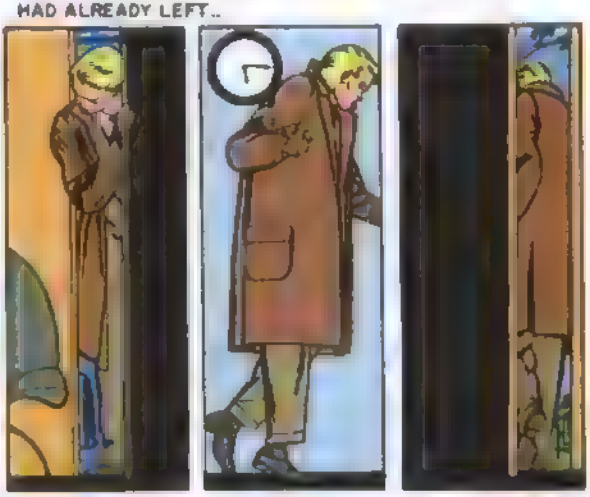

IT'S ONE OF THOSE BOMBS THAT EXPLODES IF IT'S DISTURBED. WHY... WHY, THE DEVIL! HE'S PLANNING TO KILL ME, TOO! AND HE KNOWS ABOUT THE POISON IN THE WHISKEY! I'm SURE OF IT!

STANLEY HEARD THE CRUNCHING OUTSIDE THE GARAGE WINDOW. HE PEERED OUT...



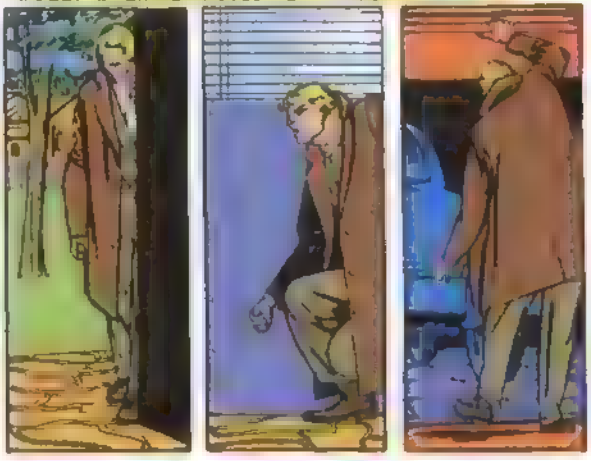
THE NEXT MORNING, EARLY, MOLLY ROSE, DRESSED QUICKLY, AND TIPTOED OUT OF THE HOUSE . . .

BUT SHE NEEDN'T HAVE BOTHERED TIPTOEING. STANLEY HAD ALREADY LEFT..



WHEN SHE RETURNED, SHE CARRIED A PACKAGE. SHE HURRIED TO HER ROOM, BEING CAREFUL NOT TO DISTURB STANLEY WHEN SHE PASSED HIS CLOSED DOOR...

WHEN HE RETURNED, HE CARRIED A PACKAGE. HE HURRIED TO THE GARAGE, BEING CAREFUL NOT TO DISTURB MOLLY WHEN HE PASSED HER SHADED WINDOW



AND LATER THAT DAY, MOLLY HANDED STANLEY HIS GIFT...

AND STANLEY GAVE MOLLY HER GIFT..

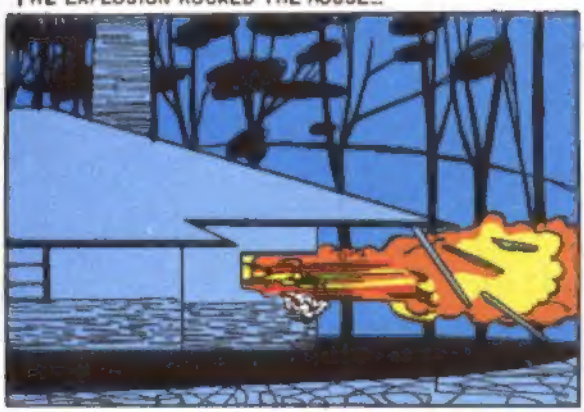
MOLLY UNWRAPPED THE CAKE GINGERLY...

STANLEY UNWRAPPED THE WHISKEY...

MOLLY EXCUSED HERSELF AND CARRIED THE CAKE INTO THE BEDROOM. CAREFULLY... OH, SO CAREFULLY SHE CUT AWAY THE CAKE...REMOVED ITS LETHAL CONTENTS... AND DROPPED IT INTO THE PAIL OF WAITING WATER...

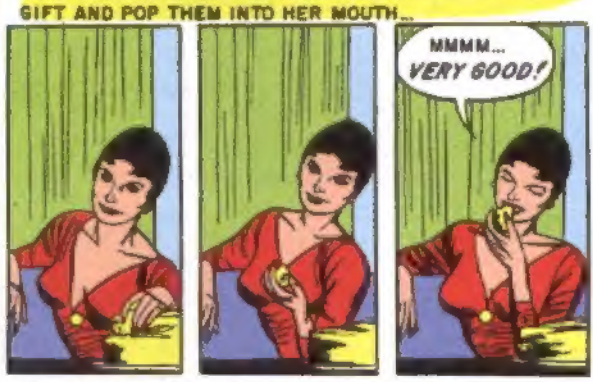
STANLEY HURRIED INTO THE KITCHEN...STRODE TO THE SINK. THERE WAS NO USE LEAVING THE POISONED CONTENTS OF THE BOTTLE AROUND ANY LONGER THAN NECESSARY...

THE EXPLOSION ROCKED THE HOUSE...



MOLLY'D BEEN CLEVER. SHE KNEW STANLEY'D SEEN HER POISON THE WHISKEY...SO THAT MORNING, SHE'D WIRED A BOMB INTO THE BOTTLE...

IN THE BEDROOM, MOLLY SMILED. SHE ABSENTLY BEGAN TO BREAK OFF PIECES OF HER ANNIVERSARY CAKE GIFT AND POP THEM INTO HER MOUTH...



BUT STANLEY'D BEEN CLEVER, TOO. HE KNEW MOLLY'D SEEN HIM PLACE THE BOMB IN THE CAKE... SO THAT MORNING HE'D POISONED IT... BUT GOOD!

—THE END—

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